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OR,

DETECTIVE BURR'S MASTER CASE.

A Romance of the Silent Tragedy.

BY HAROLD PAYNE.

CHAPTER I.

A THEORY.

"THIS appears to be a remarkably mysterious case, Burr," said the inspector, tipping his chair back, half-closing his eyes and puffing reflectively at his cigar; "a remarkably mysterious case, and I know of no one better capable of handling it than yourself."

Thaddeus (or as his friends called him, Thad) Burr, to whom Inspector Byrnes addressed his remarks, was a man of ordinary size, but one of those men who are much larger than they appear, his body being a mass of concentrated strength. His physical strength was exactly matched by his mental, for a more stubborn and inflexible will-power never existed than that of Thaddeus Burr. And yet, the casual observer would be as much deceived in this as in the

THE SCRUTINIZING EYE OF THE ALERT DETECTIVE DISCOVERED AN ALMOST IMPERCEPTIBLE HOLE IN THE SHIRT BOSOM.

measure of his physical powers, for his fair, jolly face and twinkling blue eyes indicated nothing but good-humor; and his ready smile might have been mistaken for an indication of weakness.

Burr had just returned from a successful "run" after a notorious character, and on reaching home found the inspector's letter, requesting an interview, awaiting him.

Merely taking time for a little refreshment, he had hurried over to see the inspector.

"A remarkably mysterious case," repeated the inspector, in a tone of soliloquy.

"What is the nature of it, inspector?" queried Burr, lighting the cigar which Byrnes had given him.

"Murder," replied the inspector.

"Where?"

"Here in the city. Read that," he continued, handing the detective a letter. "That will explain all that it seems within the power of mortal to explain at present."

The letter was as follows:

"INSPECTOR BYRNES:—

"DEAR SIR:—Please have one of your most efficient and trustworthy men call at No. — West Seventy-second street. There has been a murder committed, and the crime is shrouded in the deepest mystery.

"Mr. Sylvester Leland, the murdered man, was a highly respected gentleman, and much loved, especially by the poor, for his whole-souled philanthropy, and adored by his family for his gentleness and kindness. His immense wealth was always at the disposal of those in need especially those striving to help themselves, and numerous are the successful business men to-day who owe their start in life to this gentleman.

"He had three daughters and two sons, two of the former and both of the latter married and handsomely portioned off. Martha, the youngest daughter, still remained with her father, as did also the old gentleman's nephew, Laurence Leland, a great favorite with his uncle and an expectant heir of a goodly portion of his property.

"Mr. Leland was at peace with the world and, so far as is known, had not an enemy on earth. Furthermore, the crime could not have been committed for the purpose of robbery, as the old gentleman had considerable money on him, besides a valuable gold watch and a diamond pin, and these were untouched.

"So, you see, sir, the murder appears to be involved in impenetrable mystery.

"Very respectfully,

"A FRIEND OF THE FAMILY."

"Well, this does appear to be a mysterious case," said Burr, when he had finished reading the letter. "Have you done anything in the matter, inspector?"

"Yes, I called at the house, made a hasty inspection of the premises, and sent for you. I should have done the latter first, only I wasn't sure whether you would arrive to-day or not."

"You gave orders that nothing should be disturbed until we had got through, did you, sir?"

"Certainly. Not a thing has been moved since the murder was committed."

"That is good. When did it occur?"

"Some time during last night."

"Has the coroner been there yet?"

"No. At my request the business of notifying the coroner was left to me, and I will attend to it as soon as you are through with your investigations. The body is exactly in the position it was when discovered—that is, sitting in an arm-chair in the library."

"Very well, inspector; I will go at once. It is now nearly noon, and the family will be anxious to have the business through with. If you have no objection, I will keep this letter."

"By all means, Thad," said the inspector, with a twinkle in his eye. "A theory already, my boy?"

"Almost a theory," replied the other, laughing.

"I knew it, and I can tell you what it is."

"Well?"

"You think the letter was written by the same hand that committed the murder. Am I right?"

"You are, inspector. But my theory, incipient as it is, extends further than that."

"I know it. You think the writer and murderer is no other than the nephew."

"Right again. If I did not know your peculiar faculty of seeing through a millstone, inspector, I should be inclined to believe you endowed with the spirit of prophecy or of mind reading."

"Nevertheless, I'm inclined to believe you are wrong."

"Perhaps. The more so as the theory seems the most natural one, which experience has taught both you and me to suspect. However, it is a theory which can be easily abandoned without involving any other that may arise. Good-day."

"Good-by, Thad," said the inspector, grasping his hand warmly. "Do your best, my boy, and let me hear from you, as I shall watch the case with a good deal of interest."

"Very well," returned the detective, "and my name is not Thad Burr if you do not hear of progress in the course of a few days."

Burr found the Leland residence to be a

palatial mansion, everything about which indicated lavish wealth and refinement.

On presenting his card, coupled with that of Inspector Byrnes, the detective was at once shown to the library, the scene of the tragedy.

It was a large and sumptuously furnished room, well stocked with rare books and adorned with expensive statuary and bric-a-brac.

In an easy-chair drawn up in front of a writing-desk upon which a large book lay open, sat the murdered man in such a comfortable and natural position that any one would have imagined that he had merely fallen asleep.

The murdered man was probably sixty-five years of age and possessed a remarkably gentle and kindly face; and as he lay with his head thrown slightly back upon the cushion, and his long white hair hung about his face, he was certainly a picture of goodness and benevolence.

"My God!" exclaimed Burr, involuntarily, "what manner of fiend could have murdered this man?"

He imagined he saw the person near him start at sound of these words, and turning, he was surprised to see a young man standing there instead of the servant who had at first accompanied him.

The young man was probably between twenty-one and twenty-two years old, tall, dark and remarkably handsome.

He met the detective's gaze unflinchingly, but the detective could not fail to notice that it was the look of innocence and candor rather than that of hardihood and defiance.

At the end of a mutual stare of a few seconds duration, in which each appeared to be studying the other, the young man bowed politely and said in a subdued voice:

"I beg your pardon for this intrusion, sir. You are the detective sent up by Inspector Byrnes, are you not?"

"I am."

"Then I presume you would prefer to be alone. I merely stepped in to inquire whether I could be of any service to you."

"Not at present, thank you," said the detective in a milder voice, for he involuntarily warmed toward the young man in spite of his suspicions of him. "I should, as you suggest, prefer to be alone at present; but will be pleased to speak with you later. This is Mr. Leland, I take it?"

"Yes. The old gentleman was my uncle."

"So I understand from your—the letter."

The detective watched the young man's face attentively while uttering the last words, and was rewarded by seeing it change color just the least trifle.

"Yes, I am the nephew referred to in the letter," he said, in a voice that quavered a trifle.

"I will leave you now, sir. When you want me I will be found in the next room. Come in or send the servant for me, as you please."

"Thank you," returned Burr. "I shall not keep you waiting long."

"Very well; no hurry," and bowing politely, the young man left the room.

As soon as he was gone Burr began his investigations.

At first glance there appeared to be no obvious cause of death, but he quickly discovered two small crimson spots on the shirt-front, and just above them the scrutinizing eye of the alert detective discovered an almost imperceptible hole in the shirt bosom, so small that it looked as though it might have been made with a needle slightly flattened.

The hole was directly over the heart and the instrument, whatever it was, had evidently pierced that organ, producing instant death. The detective did not remove the shirt to ascertain whether it had actually done so, but accepted the theory for the time being.

A long and patient search yielded nothing more. There was no indication of a struggle, and the furniture of the room was in perfect order. A few books had been pulled down and lay, some of them on chairs and some on the floor, but this was evidently the work of the murdered man himself.

The detective was puzzled.

It was indeed a mysterious case. Search as he would he could find absolutely nothing upon which to found a theory.

Burr had about given up the search and was on the point of sending for the young man in the hope of eliciting something from him that would open up a clue, when his eye fell upon the book which the old gentleman had in front of him.

On one of the margins was the mark "XX" in a peculiar violet ink, and had been recently done.

The book was Addison's Spectator, and opposite the mark in the margin was the passage: "The follies of youth are often recompensed by a painful and wretched old age."

Further investigation revealed the fact that there was no violet ink in the room resembling that in the margin of the book.

This led the detective to hunt for a fountain pen. He found one in the old gentleman's pocket, but the ink in it was black.

It appeared clear that the mark had not been made by the old gentleman, at least in the library, and the fact might lead to a clue.

It occurred to the detective to thumb the book over for more marks, but nothing worthy of notice appeared.

He then ran through the books scattered about the room, but with the same result. Nothing out of the common was found.

Again he was about to abandon the search and send for the young man, when he noticed the corner of a paper protruding from beneath some of the books on the bottom shelf.

The detective pulled it out, and found it to be a portion of a letter, the top and bottom of which had been torn off, leaving only these lines, written in the same violet ink as that used in the mark, in the margin of the book.

"* * * * * it may prove so in your case to an eminent degree."

"Look up the passage and mark it, and when you feel inclined to censure or blame me for my conduct, refer to the quotation and derive what consolation you may from it." * * * * *

"Well," mused the detective, "the case grows more mysterious momentarily. However, this evidently refers to the passage in the book marked with the double X, and may lead to something."

It then occurred to him to compare the writing of the slip with that of the letter written to the inspector.

To his surprise, it was not only the same hand, but was written with the identical violet ink!

"Here is a clue, or I'm a Dutchman!" mused the detective. "The next thing is to find out who wrote that letter."

Putting the slip of paper away in his pocket-book, he sent the servant, who had remained just outside the door, for the young man.

The latter came in, a moment later, and approached the detective in the same calm imperturbable manner and with the same show of politeness he had shown before.

"Have you completed your investigations, sir?" he asked.

"Of the premises, yes," was the detective's reply.

"And the result?"

"Pardon me; that is my affair," a little sternly.

"Certainly, sir," said Leland in some confusion. "I should have known better than to inquire into your professional secrets. You desire to see me, I believe?"

"Yes. I wish to ask you a few questions."

"Go on. I will answer them if I can. I am willing to do anything that will lead to the clearing up of this horrible mystery."

"Very well," said Burr, again softening toward the young man. "In the first place, tell me who wrote that letter to Inspector Byrnes."

"Mr. Miles Sanford," was the prompt reply.

"Who is he?"

"As his letter indicated, a friend of the family."

"What was the bearing of the old gentleman toward him, and his bearing toward the old gentleman?"

"That of father and son."

"Sanford is a young man, then?"

"Yes, sir. That is, not more than thirty."

"Is he dissipated in his habits?"

"A little—at times, I think."

"Was the old gentleman in the habit of lecturing him about his shortcomings?"

"Yes, in a good-natured way."

"How did Sanford take it?"

"Good-naturedly, generally. Sometimes he appeared annoyed."

"But never became very angry, eh?"

"No. They always parted friends."

"Where is this Sanford to be found?"

"That I can not tell. He stops here part of the time and part of the time he boards at the Gilsey House. He was here early this morning. It was he that discovered the murder. He intended going away somewhere, and came up to see uncle before going. It was only seven o'clock and no one was up; but knowing that uncle was an early riser, he went directly to the library to see him. A moment later he came back and gave the alarm that my uncle was dead—had been murdered."

"Have you any idea what he wanted to see your uncle about?"

"Yes, I have an idea."

"Money?"

"Most likely."

"Was your uncle in the habit of giving Sanford money?"

"Yes, frequently."

"He is impecunious, then?"

"No, he has a good income; but he sometimes gets short."

"Did he receive the money as a loan, and return it?"

"He received it as a loan, I believe," said Leland, with a twinkle in his eye, "but never returned it."

"Did they ever have any words about these money matters?"

"Not that I know of. They may have. My uncle may have counseled him a little sharply upon his extravagance."

"Is Sanford a man of violent temper? Has he ever—"

"Not particularly—I beg your pardon—this

is one of Mr. Byrnes's men, I presume. I am the party under discussion—Miles Sanford!"

Burr had turned while he was speaking, and beheld a tall, handsome young man, with an intellectual face, and prematurely gray.

CHAPTER II.

LOOKS LIKE A CLUE.

SANFORD and the detective eyed each other closely for a few seconds, and finally the former said:

"I beg your pardon, detective. Really I had no business to come in upon you as I did; but I heard my name called, and I was a little curious to know what was being said about me. However, if a discussion of my habits and temper is going to advance your case any, I will withdraw while you continue it."

"Never mind, sir," said the detective. "I have learned all that is necessary about you, and now desire to learn something from you."

"Very well," said Sanford, with a careless air which was evidently habitual with him. "But, don't you think we might allow the inspector to notify the coroner now, so that the undertaker can get to work?"

"By all means," replied the detective. "Let him know at once. We can proceed with our investigations now without reference to the remains."

"Come, then; we will go to my room in the hotel, where we can talk without fear of interruption, and I can send a messenger-boy in the mean time. Of course you will remain here, Laurence?" he continued, addressing young Leland.

"On the contrary, I prefer to go," responded Leland, a little tartly. "I have something more to say to the detective."

"Pardon me, Laurence," said Sanford, firmly, and placing his hand upon the other's shoulder, "but I prefer that you should not go. Whatever you have to say to the detective can be said afterward."

"Very well," replied Leland, coloring up; "if you insist upon it."

"I do insist," retorted Sanford, tartly. "Come, detective."

Sanford called a hack and when they were inside he turned to the detective and said:

"Have you formulated any theory in this matter yet?"

"Scarcely any," replied Burr, evasively.

"I have, and I'll bet a hundred to one that I am right."

"What is it?"

"Laurence Leland is the murderer!" exclaimed Sanford in a low, firm tone that showed how earnest he was.

"What makes you think so?" demanded Burr, almost beside himself with surprise.

"Wait till we get to my room, and I'll tell you."

They rode along in silence, the detective deep in thought, striving to formulate a theory, and wondering what would be the nature of Sanford's revelations.

As they were about entering the Gilsey House a woman, dressed in black and heavily veiled, approached Sanford, and said something in a voice so low that Burr could not catch it.

Sanford plainly was confused. He evidently did not expect this meeting at this particular time, and appeared to lose his usual self-possession for the moment; but it was only for a moment, when first whispering a sentence to the woman in so deft a manner that nobody but the detective would have noticed the action, he gave a sweep with his hand and laughed carelessly as he said:

"Another time, madam, another time. Can't stop now;" and turning to the detective, he winked suggestively.

As they entered the elevator to descend to Sanford's room he turned to the detective and said:

"Queer creature, that. Lost her husband some time ago, and because I had the misfortune to know him slightly—took him home one night when he was full—she seems to think that I ought to support her, and the kids. Not only thinks it, but, by Jove, she proves it, for she has levied on me as regular for the past six months as if I was her banker."

All this was said in his usual easy-going manner and in a drawing voice which was evidently natural to him; but it was not all satisfactory to the detective. He said nothing, nodded and smiled as though he believed every word of it; but at the same time his suspicions were aroused, that there was something behind this incident which Sanford did not care to reveal.

Indeed, by the time they had reached the room Burr had pretty well made up his mind that if Sanford was not the murderer of Sylvester Leland, he at least knew more about it than an innocent man should.

He felt that he had a subtle, cunning man to deal with and would have to proceed cautiously.

"Sit down, old man, and make yourself at home," he said, as soon as the men were in the room. "Take a cigar; one can talk and think

better when one smokes. I often wonder how people who never smoke get on at all," he ran on, lighting a cigar. "Now," he continued, throwing himself into an easy-chair, "let us proceed to business. You wished to ask me something, I believe."

"Not now," said the detective. "First give me your theory—that is your reason for believing Laurence Leland to be the murderer of his uncle."

"Oh. All right," drawled Sanford, pulling reflectively at his cigar. "Well, let us see. In the first place there is a motive—that is an important factor in crime, I believe?"

"Yes."

"Laurence loves his cousin, Martha, and his uncle opposed the match."

"Ah! Did they ever have any words over the matter?" asked the detective, becoming interested.

"Frequently. On several occasions the old gentleman threatened to put him out of the house if he did not cease his attentions to the daughter."

"What was the old gentleman's objection to Laurence marrying his daughter?"

"He had several reasons for objecting to the match. One was their relationship. The old gentleman did not believe in cousins marrying. And then, Laurence's habits were such that the old gentleman did not care to trust his daughter in his hands."

"Dissipated?"

"Very."

"Was there any other motive, to your thinking?" asked the detective.

"Yes; money. The old gentleman made a will some time ago, in which he bequeathed a sixth of his property to Laurence. This will was made at a time when the old gentleman and Laurence were on good terms. Since then they have had several quarrels and the old man has threatened to revoke the will. Laurence lived in mortal dread lest the old man should carry out his threat."

"You think it likely, then that Laurence killed the old man to prevent him from revoking the will, do you?"

"Yes."

"You were at the house early this morning: Did you meet Laurence?"

"Yes. As soon as I discovered the murder I went to Laurence's room to notify him."

"How did he act?"

"Very suspiciously."

"How do you mean?"

"Why, he burst out crying like a child, and said he would be suspected of the murder on account of the quarrels he had had with his uncle. I told him he certainly would be suspected if he acted like that; that he must nerve himself up and act like a man."

This story had been told in such a straightforward, earnest manner, that it made a deep impression upon the detective, and he was beginning to think there was some truth in it. He also began to have a better opinion of Sanford, notwithstanding appearances were against him, when something happened that upset it all.

Sanford was sitting with his knees drawn up and his head bent forward, occasionally shifting his position as he talked. Suddenly in one of his shifting his cravat was bent in such a way as to force the scarf-pin sticking in it to shoot up, half-way out of the cravat.

Burr was speechless at the sight.

The pin must have been four or five inches long, was of steel and flat like a sword. Nor was this the worst. Around the place where the pin had evidently been hurriedly thrust into the cravat, was what was unmistakably a stain of blood!

Horrors! The whole thing was plain now.

This man had murdered the old man with that scarf-pin, and then thrust it back still reeking with blood into his cravat!

And now he had invented this story about the nephew to throw the suspicion upon an innocent man! For a moment the cool villainy of the thing, coupled with the man's easy-going indifference, staggered the detective.

At first blush he thought it scarcely worth while to question the fellow any further. So sure was he that the real criminal sat before him that he thought seriously of having him arrested at once.

But after a little reflection the detective concluded to satisfy himself upon one or two other matters before acting too hastily.

Sanford had not noticed that his pin had come out, or nearly so, and was calm as ever.

"Mr. Sanford," said the detective, after a moment's silence, "when you wrote to Inspector Byrnes, why did you not sign your name to the letter, instead of 'A Friend of the Family'?"

"I write to Inspector Byrnes? You astonish me, sir! I never wrote a line to him or any other detective in my life!"

His whole manner had changed. From the calm nonchalance, he had suddenly grown nervous and excited.

He sprang up and paced the room for a moment, and throwing himself into the chair facing the detective, he said, in trembling voice:

"What ever led you to believe that I wrote to Byrnes, sir?"

Burr drew the letter from his pocket, and, handing it to him, asked him if he did not write it.

Sanford took the letter, and after glancing hastily over it, said, in a slow, deliberate way, and with something of his old drawl:

"Never saw it before—never. And yet,"—here he paused, and appeared to be examining the writing minutely. "By Jove! it looks enough like my writing to pass for it!"

"And you say you did not write it?"

"Not a syllable of it, I swear it!" he exclaimed, vehemently.

"And this?" said the detective, handing him the slip of paper referring to the passage in the book.

Sanford took the slip with a nervous hand, and after examining it carefully, said:

"Nor that, either."

The detective was stumped.

What was the meaning of it all?

He felt sure that the fellow was guilty of the murder; but what could be his motive in denying the authorship of these two pieces of writing, while admitting at the same time that the hand resembled his own?

Finally a happy thought occurred to the detective.

"You will pardon my inquisitiveness, Mr. Sanford," he said, "but may I ask whether you have any ink like that?"

To Burr's surprise his answer was—

"I have. Here it is," he said running to his writing-desk and fetching a quaintly-shaped bottle. "It was given to me, bottle and all, by a friend who recently returned from China, and I do not believe—at least I was not aware until now, that it could be duplicated in tint and gloss in this country. There is something horribly mysterious about it all."

"There certainly is," returned the detective dryly. "What is the name of this friend?"

"It is a lady. Her name is—Latour—Lillian Latour. She is French, as her name indicates, and, I have known her," he continued, as he walked over to replace the bottle on the desk, "ever since we were both children."

"Do you know where she is now?"

"Yes; I know where she lives. I should have told you, perhaps, that her name is not now Latour. That was her maiden name. She is married to Francis Leland, the murdered man's youngest son."

As Sanford turned toward the desk, his scarf-pin, which had been two-thirds of the way out for some time, slipped out and fell to the floor.

He did not notice the occurrence, and as soon as his back was turned the detective picked it up and put it into his pocket.

"Have you seen this lady recently?" asked the detective, when Sanford resumed his seat.

"No—let me see—it has been about a month, I think."

"Will you give me her address?"

"With pleasure," replied Sanford, writing the address upon a slip of paper, "here it is."

"Thanks. What was the nature of her relations with her father-in-law?"

"The most friendly in the world. Indeed, it was a common remark in the family that the old gentleman treated Lillian more like a real daughter than he did his own children."

"Have you and she always remained good friends?"

"I am sorry to say we have not. Things have passed between us that—but that is of no consequence."

"No. And I won't detain you any longer now. I will see you again in a day or two."

CHAPTER III.

FOLLOWING A SCENT.

WHEN Thaddeus Burr left the Gilsey House, his first move was to see the coroner who had held the inquest and ascertain his verdict.

He found the coroner, and the results of his investigation was that "Sylvester Leland had come to his death by a stab in the vicinity of the heart inflicted by some fine instrument, the nature of which could not be determined, in the hands of some unknown person."

"Very lucid and satisfactory," said the detective. "You have no idea what the instrument was, I suppose?"

"Can't tell," was the dumb-headed official's reply.

"And you have no suspicion of who the murderer or murderers were?"

"No. It's one of those cases where you just have to let things take their course. It may leak out some time, but you can't find out anything by looking."

Burr was on the point of giving him a piece of his mind, but decided that it would be a waste of breath, and he left him.

He concluded to allow a few days for the funeral before disturbing the family again, and in the mean time called upon the inspector.

"Well, my boy," were the inspector's first words; "what do you make out of it?"

"By Jove, I can hardly say thus far," replied Burr, a trifle crestfallen.

"No clues yet?"

"Yes—or rather theories—till you can't rest. But nothing tangible. There is one that looks promising; but I'm afraid it's like our first theory, too easy to be plausible."

He then related the account of the pin, and produced the latter for Byrnes's inspection.

At the conclusion of the narrative, and when he had examined the pin carefully, the inspector said:

"You show your usual tact in refusing to accept this as a plausible theory. It is one that the bungling amateur would jump at; but the experienced detective is chary of so glaring a decoy. This pin was, in all probability, the instrument used in the murder, and it is an excellent clue to work from; but the man you saw wearing it never committed the deed. It may be that he is an accomplice and has thrown out this bait to entice you away from the right scent, knowing that when the proper time comes he can prove an *alibi*. Did you notice the initials on it—L. L.?"

"Yes; and that puzzles me all the more. L. L. may stand for Laurence Leland, or for Lillian Latour, and there are suspicious circumstances connected with both of them. That is to say, if I'm to take the word of this Miles Sanford for anything."

"What does he say?"

"Why, in the first place, he accuses Laurence Leland openly, and gives some plausible reasons for his suspicion. Then he threw light on one or two points connected with the woman, that made it look as though she might have something to do with it."

"For example, he denies writing that letter to you, but admits that the writing resembles his own, and that nobody in the country besides himself has that ink."

"Now, the ink was given him by this woman, and it is reasonable to presume that she has more of it. It may be, too, that she is capable of imitating his chirography, and as they are deadly enemies, she might not be past doing it."

"The pin may be hers or Laurence Leland's. In either case, if Sanford did not commit the murder, one of the other two may have done so, and by some mysterious means got it stuck, dripping with Sylvester Leland's blood, into his cravat. How does that strike you?"

"Good. And I'll wager my reputation that your theory will come somewhere within the regions of the truth. Go ahead, my boy, on that hypothesis, and you will come out all right."

A few days later Burr called at the Leland mansion again, and in spite of the gloom consequent upon the late tragedy, he was kindly received and entertained, while awaiting the return of Laurence, who was absent, by Miss Martha Leland, a young lady of surpassing beauty and intelligence.

Of course he did not dare to say much concerning his business to her; she appeared so gentle and angelic that any mention of such harsh matters as detective work would have caused her death. At least, so the detective thought, so he confined himself to other topics until Laurence came in.

On his arrival the two men retired to Laurence's study.

The young man evinced the same scrupulous politeness, which contrasted strangely with Sanford's off-hand manner.

"Well," said he, as soon as they were seated, "how did you make out with Sanford?"

"Oh, fairly well," returned the detective; "didn't accomplish much."

"He had a theory as to who the murderer is, of course."

"I believe he did advance something of the kind, but I am not looking for theories; what I want are facts. By the way, he denies having written that letter to Byrnes."

"Does he?" Leland laughed sarcastically.

"Do you know that he wrote it?"

"Certainly," with another laugh.

"Pardon me; but did you see him write it?" demanded the detective, looking him straight in the eye.

"N—no, not exactly. He was requested to write it, though, and I have no doubt complied."

"Is that his writing?" queried the detective, holding out the letter.

"It is," was the firm reply. "He would not dare to deny it in my presence."

"Who requested him to write the letter?"

"My cousin, Francis Leland."

"Ah! He is the one who married Lillian Latour, is he not?"

"Yes."

"Then he was here the night of the murder?"

"Yes; Francis and his wife called Sunday evening and remained over night; but she was taken suddenly ill as soon as the murder was discovered and insisted upon being driven home."

"Where and when did Francis see Sanford?"

"He was to stop at the hotel on their way down-town."

"Did he do so?"

"I have no doubt he did, inasmuch as the letter was written, and in his handwriting."

"Why could not Francis or yourself, for instance, have written the letter?"

"Oh, it was a fancy of Francis's to have somebody outside of the family write it."

"That seems strange, when there was no name signed to it," said the detective, half musingly.

"They—that is Francis and his wife—could have had no motive for writing the letter and attributing it to him, could they?"

"I can imagine none."

Up to this point Laurence had retained his cool demeanor and never winced under the detective's fire, and now the latter concluded to change his tactics.

Suddenly drawing the scarf-pin from his pocket, and holding it up before the young man's eyes, he asked:

"Did you ever see that before?"

Laurence changed color and grew very nervous.

"Yes," he said, after a pause. "That belongs to Lillian Leland; although it used to be mine. She took a fancy to it because it had my initials, which are also hers, and I gave it to her. Where did you get it?"

"Never mind—I will tell you that, later. When did you see the pin in her possession last?"

"I do not remember to have ever seen it in her possession after the day I gave it to her," replied Leland, growing still more nervous.

"Pardon me, Mr. Leland, but I'm going to ask you a blunt question. Have you any idea that that identical pin was the weapon employed in the murder of your uncle?"

"Great God!" exclaimed the young man, turning ghastly pale and clutching the arms of his chair to keep from reeling to the floor. "It—it cannot be—it—it is some mistake!"

"No, there is no mistake," rejoined the detective coldly. "That is the identical instrument, which, in the hands of a cowardly assassin, pierced the noble, generous heart of that good old man."

"It—it cannot be!" groaned the young man, the tears now streaming from his eyes.

"Will you tell me," continued the detective, in the same cold, commanding tone, "who that assassin was?"

"I—I—my God! how should I know?" whimpered the young man in a voice that was pitiful from its abjection.

"Come, Mr. Leland!" cried the detective, placing his hand authoritatively on the young man's shoulder, "be a man—nerve up! There is no use of trying to shirk responsibility in that way. I know everything, and can convict you to-morrow, but I prefer to give you a chance. Come, make your confession to me. It will be a great deal better for you."

It was the mistake of Burr's life.

Whether the young man was guilty or not, the detective had pursued the wrong course, and he saw his mistake when it was too late.

The young man's whole bearing—his being it seemed, had changed.

From the quiet, drawing-room doll, he had suddenly become the image of glowering and threatening passion.

Springing to his feet and clutching his fists convulsively, he glared at the detective until it seemed as though his black eyes would flash into flame and burn holes into him.

"I confess to that foul, cowardly crime!" he fairly hissed. "Is that what your subtle logic was meant to lead up to? Is that why, by the association of sad recollections and sacred relics, you endeavored to reduce me to the pitiful condition of a child? Out of my sight this instant or I will brain you!"

But if the detective had misjudged his man, he was not to be intimidated by the storm his mistake had brought down upon him.

He allowed the young man's passion to wear itself out, and then straightening himself up in front of him, said in his coolest manner:

"My young friend, don't get excited. I may have been hasty in jumping at conclusions. If so, I ask your pardon. Don't imagine that your threats have any impression on me, and had I any further business here I should remain; but as I have not, I will take my leave, promising to see you again before many days. Good-morning."

Leland made no reply, but stood like an iron statue of sullen defiance until the detective passed out of the room.

Burr's next purpose was to see Lillian Leland, but as he did not desire that she should know him, he concluded to go in disguise.

In order to do this to his own satisfaction, it was necessary to go to his room—or studio, as he loved to call it.

The studio was in nowise connected with his residence. Indeed, it was half a dozen blocks away from it, for Thad would have none of the unpleasant features of his profession brought into his home. At home he was jolly, loving Thad Burr, the father and husband; at the studio, he was Thad Burr, the detective.

This studio was a quaint place. Situated on the second floor of a dingy old building in West Thirteenth street, no one would have suspected what it was or what was going on there. To all appearances, the only means of reaching the suite of three rooms on the second floor which Thad called his studio, was by the ordinary stairway which did service for the rest of the house. But in addition to the stairway, Thad had two other means of egress and ingress. One

was a species of elevator, which he had improvised out of what had once been a dumb-waiter. The other was a secret stairway descending inside of what, to all appearance, was an ordinary chimney.

The entrance to this was novel.

There was a commonplace looking fire-place, with a grate and considerable ashes; but Thad had only to push a small knob above the mantel, when the whole affair would swing round on a pivot out of sight, revealing the top step of the secret stairs. These stairs led to the basement of the building, and thence into a tunnel which ran through the block to Fourteenth street.

The interior of the studio itself was a study.

In addition to the mass of ordinary bric-a-brac, statues, busts, swords and other weapons of every description, there were skeletons, and horrid grinning skulls sitting round on tables or perched on brackets. One of these skulls, suspended by brass chains, served as a shade for a lamp.

Here were no end of wardrobes filled with every conceivable species of costume and "make-up," and here Thad came, after leaving the Leland mansion, to change his character.

After a half an hour's work before the mirror, Thad Burr had entirely disappeared, and in his stead a well-to-do artist with flowing side-whiskers and long curly hair, stepped forth, puffing a cigarette.

Jumping into a cab, he had himself driven to the house of Francis Leland, on Fifth avenue, near Thirty-fifth street:

On reaching the house he sent up his card on which was engraved—

CLARENCE SWINTON,

ARTIST,

21 Campus Martius,

Rome.

Thad was shown into the parlor, and in a few minutes Lillian Leland entered.

She was a very handsome blonde, petite in figure and vivacious in manner. After giving the tips of her fingers to the "artist" she sunk upon an ottoman, and said, in a languid voice:

"To what am I indebted for this call, Mr.—Mr. Swinton?" she finally made out after referring again to the card.

"I was referred to you," returned Thad, "by a friend who informed me that you had a taste for art—indeed, that you possess a rare genius yourself."

"Indeed?" was the laughing reply. "I should like to know who my discoverer is. Whatever my taste for art may be, my talent does not extend beyond a few pen and inks."

"There is where my friend claims you excel. Moreover, he claims that you have done some excellent things in the Chinese school of art—those exquisite azure bits, or violet tints, something like this, for instance," he said, handing her the letter written to the inspector!

CHAPTER IV.

A GHASTLY SHADOW.

THAD watched the lady's face intently as she took the letter, opened it, and glanced over its contents.

But he was disappointed with the result.

There was no change of expression, save that she appeared a little puzzled to know what it all meant.

Finally she said, with an indifferent drawl that reminded the detective of Sanford, except that her voice was softer:

"Why, this is a letter, sir. I understood you to be speaking of pictures."

"I beg your pardon," he said with well-feigned confusion; "I made a mistake. Here is what I intended to show you." And he handed her a pen-and-ink sketch done in violet ink, which he had procured for the occasion.

She received the picture with the same show of indifference that she did the letter, and after passing some trivial comment upon it, passed it back to the detective.

"Yes," she drawled, "I have done a little of that work, but its excellence is not such as to induce me to exhibit it to a great foreign artist."

"Your modesty, I take it, is in keeping with your reputed talent, madam. I assure you that I should be delighted to see a specimen of your work, and promise not to be severe in my judgment."

"Oh, well, you may see them," she drawled wearily, "if your happiness in any way depends on it; but I assure you that your artistic soul will be shocked at the sight."

With that she arose lazily and brought a half-dozen rather clever sketches, which the detective was surprised—I may say gratified, to see were made with the identical violet ink that the letter was written with.

Another thing he noticed, which may be mentioned in passing, was, that her appearance of languor was all put on, as her natural disposition was lively and vivacious.

"These are gems of art!" exclaimed the pretended artist, rapturously. "By the way, could you spare a little of that violet ink?"

"I should do so willingly," was the drawling reply, "if I had any; but I have not."

"Your supply is exhausted then?"

"Yes, if you can call a half a gill, all I ever had, a supply."

"Then you did not bring a great quantity with you on your return from the East?"

"On my return from the East?" she exclaimed with very wide eyes. "I never was in the East, unless you call Boston the East."

"Oh! I was under the impression that my friend had something about your being in China. I was mistaken."

"You certainly were," said she with a little laugh. "I never was outside of the United States in my life."

"By the way, Mrs. Leland," said the detective, "had you noticed the fact that this letter is written with the same ink used in your drawings?"

"No, I had not," she drawled indifferently, taking the letter and comparing it with the pictures. "It is the same, though, isn't it?"

"Yes. And do you not think it a little odd?" he asked, watching her expression.

"I do not know that it is," she answered dryly. "Any body might take a fancy to use that peculiar ink. I shouldn't have noticed it if you had not called my attention to it."

"I presume you do not recognize that handwriting, do you, Mrs. Leland?"

"I do not," she replied coldly. "However, as the letter refers to the murder of my late father-in-law, and is signed 'a friend of the family,' I presume I may know him or her, as the case may be."

"Did you ever know a gentleman named Miles Sanford?"

"Oh, yes—that is, slightly," she said indifferently.

"You never became very good friends, then?"

"Not particularly so."

"Not enough for him to make you a present, for instance?"

"No. Why do you ask?" opening her big blue eyes very wide.

"Nothing," said the detective, assuming her style of indifference, "except that he told me that you gave him a bottle of that violet ink, which you had brought from China, and that in return he gave you a peculiarly shaped scarf-pin, with your initials, 'L. L.' engraved upon it."

The detective anxiously watched the effect of this shot, and was again disappointed.

She merely arched her eyebrows and said:

"Indeed?"

The detective was nearly at the end of his tether.

So far he had made nothing out of this woman.

Either she was the greatest actress he had ever seen, or else she was innocent.

True, there was one discrepancy. She had positively denied the statement of Sanford in reference to the ink, and had not denied that Sanford had given her the pin, although the detective was tolerably sure that he had done nothing of the kind, but instead, Laurence Leland had given it to her, and Thad had only thrown this out as a bait. But for some reason, best known to herself, she had chosen to neither deny or admit the statement.

All this flashed through his mind in a moment, and then he determined to have a direct answer to his question, or resort to some other expedient.

"Pardon me, Mrs. Leland," he began, in his softest and most persuasive tone, "but, inasmuch as you say that you never possessed any amount of this ink, Mr. Sanford's statement that you gave him a large bottle of it must be false, is it not?"

"It would naturally follow," she said, with another sarcastic arching of her brows.

"But what is your statement?"

"I have none," she said, dryly.

"How about the pin, madam?" demanded the detective, in an urgent voice. "Did he, or did he not give you such a pin?"

"My dear Mr.—what's-your-name—Swinton," she said, rising imperiously, "it strikes me that you are rather inquisitive. Now, please tell me how it can concern you, as an artist, whether a certain gentleman gave me a certain pin or not?"

"With pleasure, madam," returned the detective, also rising, and standing before her. "My reason for being so inquisitive is the fact that I have found such a pin as I describe, and have been informed that it belongs to you. If it does, and you can describe it, I shall be only too happy to surrender it to you."

"Well, then, once for all allow me to inform you that I cannot describe the pin, as I know nothing about it. And now, sir, I trust that our interview is at an end, as I have duties to attend to. Good-afternoon, sir."

And before Thad had time to think, she had flounced out of the room and left him standing there.

Thad was floored, but not discouraged.

He had gained, if not all he wanted, at least a point or two, and that was worth the pains it had cost.

He had learned enough to convince him that the woman was either directly guilty of the

murder or an accomplice, and he determined to proceed upon that theory.

His next move was to see Sanford again, but before he could go to the hotel it would be necessary to remove his disguise, and to do this he must return to his studio.

As he was leaving the house the detective was surprised to see a woman dressed in black, and heavily veiled, glide in at the front door past the butler, as though she belonged there.

He could not help but recognize her, in spite of her veil, as the same woman that stopped Sanford at the Gilsey House.

Her appearance here, and as an inmate of this house, put a new phase upon the whole matter.

Sanford had told him that she was a poor woman who had lost her husband, and whom he had to support.

This statement was now clearly untrue, and if so, probably all of Sanford's statements were likewise untrue.

The detective was in a worse quandary than ever.

It was dark when he got into the street, and as the night was pleasant and he felt a want of exercise, he concluded to walk.

As he crossed over from Fifth avenue to Broadway his mind was so absorbed with his thoughts that he scarcely realized where he was. Suddenly coming to his senses he found himself standing still, vacantly gazing at a statue he had seen a thousand times, and took no interest in at any time.

He felt a little ashamed of as well as surprised at himself, and as he started to move away, took a hasty glance around to see if any one was looking at him, when he was surprised to see, or imagined he saw, some one dodge into the gloom of a doorway.

Thad tried to think it was imagination or an optical illusion, but still the thought haunted him that there was somebody there, and that his (Thad's) presence had something to do with it, and therefore he decided to keep an eye out as he proceeded to ascertain whether he was being shadowed or not.

The detective sauntered leisurely across Broadway, and as he turned down that street his side-vision caught sight of a man tip-toeing across to the same side.

He might be mistaken in thinking the fellow was following him, and to test the matter he walked on briskly until he reached the corner and stopped.

The fellow also stopped, pretending to be suddenly interested in something in a shop-window.

Thad turned suddenly in his direction, hoping to catch a glimpse of his face, but the fellow was too discreet to allow that, and kept his back to the detective.

Burr was not at all anxious about the matter, beyond a curiosity to know who the shadower was and why he was following him.

He felt pretty sure of one thing, however, and that was that the shadower was in all likelihood a spy sent by Lillian Leland; and if so, she had suspected who he was.

This thought wounded his pride a little, but he concluded to pursue his way regardless of him, only taking care that he did not get the advantage of him.

Instead of going down Broadway when he got to Thirty-third street, the detective went down Sixth avenue, it being a darker and less crowded street at this hour of the day, intending thereby to give the fellow a chance to do something, if that was what he was after.

For some distance the shadower kept at an even distance—scarcely half a block—behind the detective, and took no pains to conceal himself, so that Thad came several times to doubt whether he really was following him. But his doubts fled the moment he would stop, for the shadower would do the same.

Finally Thad decided to give him the slip in a way he did not expect.

Springing into a cab that happened to be standing near the curb, with the horse's head turned up-town, he told the driver to drive straight ahead.

The vehicle dashed off at a lively gait, and the detective was gratified on looking back to see the fellow standing on the sidewalk looking after him in a dazed sort of way.

When the cab had gone four or five blocks up-town, Thad had the driver turn and go down Seventh avenue to Fourteenth street, where he alighted and walked the remainder of the way to his studio.

As he approached the house in which his rooms were situated, he was congratulating himself upon the successful manner in which he had given his shadower the slip.

The street at that point was poorly lighted, so that you could not distinguish a person at any great distance. When within a few doors of his own place, the detective was surprised to see his shadower standing in plain view.

For an instant Thad was nonplused.

There were two things that worried him. One was to know who the fellow was, and the other, how the fellow knew him in his disguise and the location of the studio, which he had believed up to that moment to be unknown, except to a few friends.

It would not do to stop to speculate, however. Mysteries were increasing, and it was necessary to work earnestly and persistently until they were cleared up.

Thad was not long in making up his mind what to do. Instead of stopping to demand what the fellow meant by following him, as he at one time thought of doing, he walked on by him and past the studio as indifferently as though he knew nothing of either. Going west to Eighth avenue, he turned into that street and went up to Fourteenth. Turning east along the latter street for half a block, he came to a neat little house that sat back a little way from the street.

The detective appeared to beat home here, for he did not even stop to ring the bell or knock, but putting a key into the door, opened it and went in.

He did not meet any one in the hall of this house, and no wonder. Nobody occupied the house but a cranky old bachelor (the owner) whose name was Aminadab Grote. He was a warm friend of the detective, and allowed him, and him alone, free access to his house.

Thad did not stop to interview his friend just now, however, but opening a door at the rear of the hall he descended a flight of stairs that led into the basement.

At one end of the basement Thad found a door, dark as it was, which he opened without the use of a key, by pressing a secret spring.

This door led into a tunnel, along which the detective proceeded with a rapid stride, and had soon reached the stairs leading up into his studio.

It did not take the detective long to mount the stairs, and at the head of which to press the secret spring which caused the fireplace to swing aside, and enter his studio.

So much time had been consumed in dodging his shadower, that the evening was pretty well advanced, and he had no time to lose if he desired to call upon Sanford that night, so Thad hurried at once into the rear and smallest room and proceeded to remove his disguise, without stopping to strike a light in the front room.

While he stood before his mirror at work demolishing the artist face, he thought he saw another face in there besides his own. He dismissed the idea as idle fancy at first; and refused to humor it enough to turn round.

When he had finished his toilet a few moments later, however, and started to enter the front room again, he was thunderstruck at the sight that met him.

The man who had been following him stood before him in the doorway. And he was the very image of the murdered man!

CHAPTER V.

A SURPRISE.

SUPERSTITION was something entirely foreign to Thad Burr's nature.

He believed in the existence of no ghosts or hobgoblins.

However, the apparition before him gave him a start, such as he had not experienced for many a day.

True, he had no other thought than that it was a real flesh-and-blood man, and his first impulse was to demand an explanation of his presence. But along with this thought came the question: "If it is a human being how did it get into that room?"

And then before the detective could have time to decide what to do (although he only hesitated a few seconds) the man, or spirit, whichever it was, turned and walked to the front door and, opening it quickly, strode out.

Scarcely a second elapsed after its disappearance when Thad, having regained his presence of mind was out the door.

But to his surprise when he sprung into the hall not a soul was to be seen.

The hall was dimly lighted, the gas being turned very low, and the fellow might be concealing himself somewhere.

So Thad turned up the gas until the hall was a blaze of light, but no one was to be seen, in short no one was there.

"Well," mused Thad, wiping the perspiration from his brow, "if I was inclined to believe in ghosts, I should certainly take that for one. How the deuce he got into that room, and then out of this building with outmaking any noise or consuming any time is a mystery that beats my time."

This had only taken a few seconds, and Thad dashed out of the front door into the street, hoping to catch the strange creature, whoever he was, before he got out of sight.

But here he was again doomed to disappointment. There was one or two pedestrians in sight, but none that resembled the late visitor.

This was very puzzling, but optimistic that he was, he made up his mind not to trouble himself any further just then about it, believing that it would all be explained in good time. Besides he had no time to investigate the matter if he hoped to see Sanford that night.

So, returning to his studio and making himself up as a spruce young dandy, including eyeglass and cane, he again sallied forth.

A few moments' walk brought him to Broad-

way, where he took a car, and in ten minutes more was at the Gilsey House.

A tap on Sanford's door brought the drawling response—"Come in."

Thad turned the knob and when he opened the door, he was a little surprised to find that odd individual with his back toward him, his feet cocked up, smoking a cigar and reading as attentively as though he had not just invited the detective to enter.

"Well, how was it?" drawled Sanford, without looking up.

"That depends upon what you refer to, Mr. Sanford," said Thad.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Sanford, glancing up. "I thought I was talking to another party. Pardon me, old fellow, but you have the advantage of me. I know the voice, but bless me if I know the face from Adam."

"Perhaps not," said the detective laughing, "but maybe you will recognize that," tossing a card.

"Oh, the deuce! It's you, is it? Well, roast me alive if your mother would recognize you in that make-up."

"Maybe not, Mr. Sanford; but it is necessary sometimes in our business that we shouldn't be too easily known."

"I suppose so," drawled Sanford; "but what progress, old fellow?"

"Oh, fair. I had an interview with Laurence Leland."

"Yes? Well, what did you make out? Didn't he conduct himself like a man that had been guilty of a crime?"

"I must admit that he did; and yet I do not believe him guilty."

"No?" drawled Sanford. "Why not?"

"You will pardon me for not telling you why, sir," said Thad firmly. "Suffice it that I do not!"

"Then you suspect somebody else undoubtedly."

"I do."

"Me, perhaps."

"I did not say so."

"That's comforting, anyway," drawled the other, with a good natured laugh. "By the way, take a cigar, and pardon me for not inviting you before. And confound it, sit down. That's more like it. Now, what have you to say to me? Talk fast, as we may be interrupted at any moment. A friend of mine was calling on me just before you came in, and he will be back again shortly."

"Well, first of all, I want to tell you that I called upon your ex-friend, Mrs. Lillian Leland."

"Yes? Charming woman, isn't she?"

"Rather; a trifle subtle, though, I think."

"Do you think so?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Well, maybe she is; still, she's very pretty. Don't you think so?" drawled Sanford, with a mysterious twinkle in his eye.

"Oh, yes, pretty enough," admitted the detective, dryly. "It's a misfortune that most designing women are pretty."

"Their stock in trade, old fellow. It would be madness for an ugly woman to engage in diplomacy. Well, what did Lily have to say?"

"A great deal that was surprising to me. In the first place, she denies having given you the violet ink; says she was never outside the United States in her life, or possessed more than half a gill of that ink."

"I'm not surprised at that."

"Why, is she such an incorrigible liar as all that?"

"No. I do not know that she is a liar at all."

"But you told me that she gave you that ink, and that she brought it from China. Did you not?"

"I told you that she gave me the ink, which she certainly did, although it did not belong to her. I did not go into the details then, as I did not deem it necessary. I will now if you desire it."

"I should like to have the point cleared up if possible," said Thad.

"Well, then, the facts are simply these. Lillian's brother brought the ink from China, and gave her a small bottle of it. With this she drew a few pictures, and he was so infatuated with them that he worried the life out of her to draw more. I was at the house one day, and after telling me of the circumstance, she suddenly said: 'There's only one way of getting out of drawing those pictures, and that is to give you the rest of the ink.' With that she gave me that bottle. I did not know then that it wasn't hers, and after we had the flare-up, nothing more was ever said about it."

"This being true, Mr. Sanford," said the detective, "who, in your opinion, wrote that letter?"

"That I cannot tell," replied Sanford.

"I don't mind telling you, Mr. Sanford," continued the detective, "that there are those who accuse you not only of being the author of that letter, but of being guilty of the murder. I also wish to tell you that I do not believe either; and therefore ask you to assist me to find the guilty party."

"Nothing could afford me greater pleasure, Mr. Burr," said Sanford, earnestly; "and as

my time is not particularly occupied, it is entirely at your disposal."

"Thank you. I shall gladly avail myself of a portion of your time. Now, in the first place, I would like to have you find out, if possible, who wrote that letter. It is in your handwriting and written in an ink which nobody possesses but yourself. So that if the matter should come before a court of justice the evidence would be very strong against you."

"There is not the slightest doubt of that," said Sanford, reflectively. "But what, may I ask, has the authorship of this letter to do with the question at issue—the murder?"

"A great deal. There is a story connected with the author of that letter, which I will not reveal now, but which bears very heavily on the case."

"Very well. I will not attempt to anticipate your clue, but do all in my power to make the discovery you desire. What else can I do?"

"There are several other things I wish to ask you. In the first place, you remember the veiled woman who stopped you the other day, and whom you said you were supporting?"

"Yes."

"What has she to do with the Lelands—I mean Francis Leland's family?"

"Nothing that I know of."

"You are sure of that?"

"Yes. Why?"

"Do you, or do you not, know that she is a privileged inmate of their house?"

"If she is I do not know it."

"Might she be such without your knowledge?"

"She might. You see I have known very little of the family since our difference."

"Do you suppose you could find out?"

"I think I can."

"Do then. Another thing: What are now and have been the relations between Laurence Leland and Lillian?"

"Very friendly, I believe."

"Anything out of the way?"

"Not so far as I know. When the quarrel took place between Lillian and her husband and myself, Laurence took sides with them against me, and, as a consequence Laurence and I have been a little cool toward each other ever since."

"Do you remember of Laurence giving her a pin with their mutual initials engraved on it?"

"Very well."

"Have you ever seen the pin since?"

"Frequently—in her possession."

"When was the last time you saw the pin?"

"I don't remember—probably two years ago."

"Not since?"

"No."

"Have you lost a scarf-pin within two weeks?" asked the detective, looking him straight in the eye.

"Let me see—yes. I lost one, I remember, the very day you were in here before," replied Sanford, growing more animated than Thad had ever seen him.

"Do you remember what kind of a pin it was?"

"No. And I remember that I was surprised when, after missing it out of my scarf, I found all the pins I possess in the cushion where I usually keep them."

"After making this discovery, did you still think you had lost one?"

"I thought nothing more about the matter. Or, rather, I believe, I thought that I must have obtained a new pin some place, and with that dismissed the matter from my mind."

"Have you any recollection of putting a pin into your scarf that morning?"

"No."

"You are positive, though, that you had one, are you?"

"Why, yes, because I was on the point of losing the pin at one time, and a friend called my attention to it."

"Was that before or after you called at the Leland mansion?"

"After. I had just returned after discovering the murder, and being somewhat upset, stepped into the bar for a drink of brandy to brace my nerves, and seeing a friend in there I invited him to join me. He accepted the invitation, and as we approached the bar he said that I was about to lose my scarf-pin, at the same time pushing it back into its place."

"Who was this friend?"

"Harry Latour, Lillian's brother. You shall probably see him this evening. He promised to be back."

"Have you any recollection of what the pin you wore that morning was like?"

"Only a vague one."

"Do you think you would recognize it if you saw it?"

"Possibly. Yes, I think I should."

"Is that it?" demanded the detective, suddenly holding the pin up before his eyes.

Sanford took the pin and examined it a moment, and suddenly turning pale, exclaimed:

"Great Heavens! where did you get that pin, Mr. Burr?"

"I picked it up here in your room after seeing it drop out of your cravat."

"My cravat?" he almost screeched, running his fingers through his hair nervously.

"Yes," replied the detective, coolly. "Why?"

"That is the pin that Laurence Leland gave Lillian and has caused more trouble in the family than anything else."

"How?"

"Why, in the first place, the pin first belonged to the old gentleman that was murdered, when he was a young man. It then had a gold hilt like a dagger. One night he got into a quarrel with a companion, and in the course of the melee that followed, young Leland stabbed and killed his companion with the scarf-pin. The case was proven self-defense and nothing was done with him."

"This dead companion's brother wanted the pin as a memento, and Leland gave it to him. On receiving it, it is said, the young man said to Leland, 'This pin will be the death of you yet.' Years afterward this man gave the pin to the son of his dead brother (the son was an infant when his father was killed,) who in turn gave it to Laurence Leland. Laurence had the hilt removed and the medallion you see put in its place, with his initials engraved on it. He afterward gave it to Lillian Latour. It was on account of this pin that Laurence had the first quarrel with his uncle, and through it that Lillian and I became enemies. Let me break it into a thousand pieces, Burr!" he cried, making a violent demonstration.

"Not yet," returned the detective coolly regaining possession of the pin. "Will you show me the cravat you had on that morning, Mr. Sanford?"

"Certainly," he replied, rising to get the article. "Here it is."

"Did you notice," said the detective taking the cravat and pointing to the place at which the pin had entered, "that there had been blood on the pin when it was stuck into the cravat?"

"Great heavens! I had not noticed it, but there is blood on that cravat, that is certain. What does it all mean?"

"That is what I am trying to find out," said the detective. "It means this much, however, that Sylvester Leland was murdered with that pin, and the murderer stuck it, dripping with blood, into your cravat."

"My God! This is awful!" cried Sanford excitedly. "And do you think that I—I am the murderer?"

"No. In spite of appearances, I do not."

"Oh, thank you, sir. You will never regret this kindness. I—"

But here they were interrupted by the opening of the door, and entrance of a man.

"My friend, Mr. Latour, Mr.—"

"Not Burr," whispered Thad just in the nick of time.

"Mr. Smith," continued Sanford.

Thad bowed and the two men shook hands, but he was almost taken off his feet at sight of the stranger.

It was the same party who had shadowed him, and was also in his room!

CHAPTER VI.

A REVELATION.

THAD BURR was gratified to see that Latour did not recognize him in his present disguise, and settled himself down to listen to whatever he might say, in the hope that he might reveal something important.

Sanford evidently knew nothing of the shadowing episode, else he would have put his friend on his guard.

The latter threw himself into a chair with a yawn, and then taking a cigar from the box lighted it, settling himself back for a quiet smoke.

Sanford was the first to break the silence.

"Well, Harry," he drawled, "how did you come out?"

"Didn't come out at all," replied Latour.

"Fact is, didn't see the party at all."

"That's funny," said Sanford. "What kept you so long?"

The other burst out into an uproarious laugh. "Funniest thing in the world, Miles," he said.

"An adventure, a real adventure."

"Woman, of course," drawled Sanford.

"No."

"No? Who in the name of wonder could it have been?"

"An artist."

"An artist?"

"Yes; or a poet. But I'm inclined to think he was an artist."

"Well, what about him?"

"I'll tell you," said Latour, blowing out a long puff of smoke; "I was down on Thirteenth street looking for the party we were talking about, when what does I see but a cove with long hair, flowing whiskers and a slouch hat, come out of a house."

"Thinks I, old fellow, you're up to some mischief, and I followed him; and where do you suppose he went?"

"To the nearest saloon, maybe."

"No."

"To a—"

"Oh, you won't guess it in a month of Sundays," interrupted Latour. "Well, sir, he went to Frank's house."

"That's strange," drawled Sanford. "By the way, Mr.—Mr. Smith here was there this afternoon. Did you see anything of a crazy-looking artist at the Lelands Mr. Smith?"

"Why, yes, I believe I did," replied Thad, with assumed indifference. "Some one answering your description went in as I was coming out."

"Well," continued Latour, I waited for him to come out, and I had to wait a very long time; but he finally came, and I followed him again."

"Well, it seems that he tumbled to my game finally and tried to give me the slip—jumped into a cab and dashed up-town—but it was no use. I knew where he came from and where he would probably pull up, so I strolled along in front of his ranch, and pretty soon sure enough he came along."

"But he didn't go in just then. As soon as he saw me he walked on by and entered his room from a back way—but he found me there ahead of him."

"In the room?" asked Thad, as though he knew nothing about it.

"Yes."

"Come off!" cried Sanford. "How did you get into the room?"

"That is the funniest part of it," said Latour, laughing. "This artist, or whatever he is, is on the second floor, and a fellow by the name of Burke lives on the first. I know Burke first-rate, and asked him where the artist lived. He said he didn't know of any artist, but that there was an eccentric chap of some kind on the next floor."

"I asked him if there was any way to get into the rooms. He asked me what I wanted to get into the rooms for, and I told him just for a joke. Well, he took me into the basement and showed me an old dumb-waiter, and said that he believed the party sometimes went up that way, but that if I did, and got my head shot off I mustn't blame him. I told him I would risk it, only to leave his door open so that I could dodge in quickly in case I was pushed for time."

"Well, I went up and hid myself in the front room, and pretty soon the artist came in, but how, I'll never tell you. No door was opened or anything, and yet all of a sudden there he was as large as life, like a ghost."

"He didn't strike any light in the front-room, but went into another room, struck a light and what do you suppose he did?"

"Went to bed?" drawled Sanford.

"No; he took off his flowing whiskers and long hair."

"Then what?" asked Thad.

"Why, just then he discovered me and I made tracks. He must have thought I vanished into air, for I only took two steps to get down-stairs; and as Burke's door was open I dodged in. As soon as the fellow went back I skipped out, and here I am to tell the tale."

"Having been in the fellow's rooms, what do you think he is, an artist?" asked the detective.

"I can hardly tell. It was so dark in the room that I couldn't see much, but my opinion is that he is some kind of a crook, or maybe a detective, from his coming in the way he does and going disguised."

"Do you think of exploring the place again?" asked Thad.

"Yes; I'm going to turn detective and find out who and what the fellow is."

"My advice to you," said Sanford, "is not to do it. If he is a detective or a crook, either one, he is liable to shoot you."

"I'll risk it," he answered with a sneer. "I'm equal to any detective I ever saw. But I must go," he said, suddenly rising. "I have an engagement this evening that I had forgotten."

And before anybody could offer any resistance he was gone, as unceremoniously as he came.

"What do you think of him?" drawled Sanford.

"Queer chap, I should say," returned Thad.

"But what strikes me is his strang resemblance to old Mr. Leland; he's the very image of him."

"Yes, that has often been remarked. He looks more like the old man than either of his sons, and yet there was not the slightest relationship, so far as anybody knows."

"And you say he is Lillian's brother?"

"Yes. Not much resemblance, eh?"

"Not the slightest. Was he on friendly terms with the old gentleman?"

"I believe so; though he's such a rattle-brain you can't tell much about his relationship with anybody. Sometimes he will call upon me half a dozen times a day or night; and come in at any hour, if the door happens to be unlocked, just as you saw him do to-night; and then again I won't see him for three months. He hasn't been in his sister's house now for six months, I believe."

"Any disagreement between them?"

"No; it's just a fancy he has taken."

"Does he ever come into your rooms when you are absent?"

"Frequently; and sometimes I wake up in the morning and find him asleep on my lounge. He has a key."

"Aren't you afraid to trust him in that way?"

"No. He's as honest as the day is long, and a thoroughly good fellow, with all his eccentricity."

"Perhaps," said the detective dryly. "By the way, Sanford, there is another question I want to ask you."

"Well?"

"It is in regard to old Leland's wife. I have heard no mention of her. Is she dead, or is she still living?"

"Nobody knows. There is a strange story connected with that."

"Years ago, while Martha, their youngest daughter, was an infant, there was a strange woman came to the house one night, and asked for Mr. Leland. She was shown to the library, where he was, and they had a long conversation about something. Leland's wife was of a jealous disposition, and when she learned that another woman was alone with her husband, she slipped in and concealed herself behind a curtain to overhear what was said."

"What she heard nobody knows, but after the woman left, Mrs. Leland was missing, and she has never been heard from since."

"Did anybody ever know who the strange woman was?"

"No."

"Might not she have been a former wife of the old man?"

"That was the supposition. The old man was rather wild when a young man, and some think that the wife, hearing some startling or disgraceful revelation, went off and committed suicide."

"That is a strange and sad story," said Thad. "But, I must go, Mr. Sanford. Don't forget what I told you. Find out who wrote that letter, if possible; and also what the veiled woman's position is in the Leland (Francis) mansion. By the way, you have never told me her name."

"Ruggles is the name she gave me," drawled the other, "and I never had curiosity enough to inquire any further. One name is as good as another for such a person."

"That's true. Well, you will attend to the other matters, won't you?"

"With all my heart and skill."

"Very well. Good-night!"

"Good-night. I shall see you in a day or two, I trust."

"Yes, in a day or two at most," said Thad, grasping his hand.

When the detective reached the street, he proceeded directly to his studio; and as the coast appeared to be clear, he entered by the front way.

It was very late, long after midnight, in fact, and Thad was very tired, so he retired at once.

As he lay in bed thinking over the exciting events of the day, and laying his plans for the morrow, his mind suddenly reverted to the elevator where Latour had entered.

At first he thought of getting up and fastening it in such a way that it could not be used, but upon second thought he concluded that nobody would probably come in at that hour, and so humored his laziness and smothered his apprehensions at the same time.

He also reviewed the fellow Latour; but after mentally going over all that he had seen or heard of him, he could not make up his mind whether he was a dissembling criminal or a rattle-brained fool.

Finally giving preference to the latter theory, however, he gradually sunk into a deep sleep.

But even in sleep he did not get rid of the fellow, for he, in company with the other characters in the mysterious drama, continued to haunt him, but were mixed up in such a bewildering manner that he could make neither head nor tail out of them.

How long he slept, the detective knew not, when he was suddenly awakened by a noise in the room, and felt himself oppressed by a smothering sensation.

With a desperate effort he threw a mass of some kind of soft material from his face, and at once realized that the stuff was saturated with chloroform.

For a moment a severe dizziness accompanied by a nausea oppressed him to such a degree that he was unable to rise.

Pulling himself together, however, and exerting the utmost of his giant strength, he finally succeeded in rising to a sitting posture.

It was pitch dark in the room where he was, but he could see a dim light in the front room.

Gliding softly out of bed, he peered through the door.

To his horror he beheld two masked men, one of whom was ransacking the drawers of a cabinet and the other was busily engaged in going through the detective's clothing.

His mind was instantly made up what to do.

He made an effort to reach a stand upon which he had laid his pistols on going to bed, but in his weak condition he staggered against the stand, making a great noise.

The next instant a deafening report crashed upon the stillness of the night and a ball whistled unpleasantly close to his head.

This had the effect of nerving him up, and grasping his revolver, the detective planted him-

self in the doorway and fired at his assailant, who was the man at the cabinet.

With a roar of pain, accompanied by a curse, the fellow staggered and reeled like a drunken man.

But, strange to say, he did not fall to the floor.

At the very moment when Thad expected to see him fall, the fellow appeared to suddenly gain new strength, and hurling his pistol in Thad's direction, bounded toward the door, opened it, and vanished.

While this was going on, the fellow with the detective's clothes, who appeared to be unarmed, stood motionless, as if transfixed with fear or astonishment.

Seeing that he made no attempt to shoot, Thad threw down his pistol, and springing upon him, clutched him by the throat.

The detective found that he had a sturdy antagonist, and a fierce struggle ensued for several minutes.

Thad was at the disadvantage of having an antagonist whose efforts were only directed toward self-defense, and at the very moment when he thought he had him at a disadvantage, the fellow broke his hold and escaped.

CHAPTER VII.

IN THE LION'S DEN.

THADDEUS BURR did not dash out after the fugitives, as most ordinary people, and some detectives, would have done.

He knew the folly of haste, and, moreover, he knew, in reason, that the men, whoever they were, had prepared the course of their retreat in advance, and it would be idle to attempt to follow them at this particular hour—just before daylight—the darkest hour of the twenty-four.

He therefore turned his attention first to the cabinet and then to his clothes, to ascertain what they had taken.

From the cabinet they had taken nothing, as there wasn't anything there, beyond private papers which were of no value to any one except the owner.

The clothes did not fare so well.

True, there was no money or jewels, as Thad had removed his pocketbook before going to bed, and he never wore jewelry of any kind.

But the thief got something which, to the detective, was far more valuable than either money or jewels.

He had taken the scarf-pin and a pocketbook containing the two specimens of penmanship—that is, the letter to Inspector Byrnes and the slip of paper, written in violet ink.

This was an unfortunate loss, and caused the detective a momentary pang of regret.

But upon a moment's reflection he considered that after all the loss might not be irreparable—the articles might be regained; besides their very loss was not without profit.

It led to a clue.

The very fact that any one should come into his room and steal those ordinary valueless articles, proved that there was somebody interested in keeping them from the public, at least from the eyes of justice.

Now who could that somebody be?

Certainly somebody connected with the crime, the mystery of which Thad was working might and main to clear up.

Here was a better clue than the pin and writing themselves, and if the guilty party or parties had only known it, it would have been to their interest to leave the articles in the detective's possession.

As matters now stood their only chance of escape would be to avoid identification, which, notwithstanding they were masked, would hardly be possible, considering whom they had to deal with.

While these thoughts were flitting through the detective's head, he was not idle.

Little rest as he had had, he was now thoroughly awake and ready for business.

Hastily dressing himself in a rough suit of clothes, he stepped in front of his mirror, and with a few skillful touches metamorphosed his face into that of a sturdy workingman of the better class.

Next arming himself with pistols and knives, and putting his dark-lantern into his pocket, he was about leaving the room, when his attention was attracted by something white on the floor.

Flashing his lantern down upon it he found it to be a piece of paper folded very small.

The detective picked it up and opened it, and holding it in the light of his lantern, read the following, written in a beautiful round hand:

"To JIM and DACE:—

"It must be done to-night. He will be in and the **** are on his person. No blood if you can avoid it. Chloroform is better and leaves no stain. The entrance is easy by the way I told you. If necessary **** will show you the way. He will let you in anyway when you use the password I gave you. Don't leave without the **** and ****, and don't stop for anything else. I will pay you well enough for your job.

"When job is done, meet me at 135 * * * XXXIII.

"* * * * *

"This is a rich find," mused the detective,

"If the perpetrator or instigator of this thing had desired to tell me all about it, he could hardly have made it more plain. The first four stars refer to the articles they have taken, and the five stars further along stand for 'B-u-r-k-e,' my neighbor on the floor below. I have an eye on him. The next six stars stand for 'l-e-t-t-e-r,' and the other three for 'p-i-n.' Now, let me see," he mused, examining the note, "'135' two stars, West, three 'X's' and three 'I's,' Thirty-third—135 West Thirty-third street. Plain as the nose on your face."

"Thad, old boy, you're in luck."

So, saying, he put the paper into his pocket, and passing out through the secret passage, was soon making his way along Fourteenth street toward Eighth avenue, with a tin pail in his hand, and anybody meeting him at that early hour of the morning would have taken him for a laboring man on his way to work.

At Eighth avenue he jumped on an up-town car, and a few minutes' ride brought him to Thirty-third street.

Here he jumped off the car and made his way along Thirty-third street, on the upper side, till he came to the number, 135, which was near Sixth avenue.

It was a two-story dingy brick building, the ground floor of which was occupied as a saloon of the lower order.

The detective walked into the place, and as they had just opened, there was nobody in except the barkeeper and a boy, who were dusting and cleaning up.

Thad ordered a glass of beer and sat down at a table, ostensibly to drink at his leisure, but in reality to wait for his game.

As the minutes went by a few early stragglers dropped in, drank and went out, or stopped to chat with the barkeeper.

After waiting half an hour two suspicious-looking characters came in, glanced inquiringly about, and finally slouched up to the bar.

Thad watched them out of the corner of his eye while pretending to be interested in the morning paper, and soon saw them engaged in the double occupation of pouring out a drink and conversing with the barkeeper.

It was evident from the mysterious air of the three men that their conversation was of a confidential nature.

Finally the two men came back and sat down at a table near the one at which the detective was sitting, and then he noticed that one of them had his arm in a sling.

"That accounts for their delay," mused Thad. "They had to go and have this fellow's arm dressed."

As soon as the two men sat down they ordered more drinks and soon began to talk, first in voices so low that the detective could not catch a word, but later, as the liquor began to take effect, in a louder tone.

"I wonder why he don't come," said one. "Dese dandy coves seems to tink dat us chaps ain't got nothin' ter do but jest wait fer dem, see?"

"Oh, don't get restless, Jim," said the other. "We're comfortable heer, an' dere's no use cryin' w'en ye can't help yerself. Ye'll git well paid fer de job, an' w'at more d'ye want?"

"I reckon you'd cry too, Dace, if ye had a pound o' lead stickin' in yer fin, an' more dan me, see?"

"Too bad ye didn't perforate de chicken dat time," growled Dace.

"Hows ye goin' ter perforate anyt'ing in de dark? I ain't got no cat's eyes."

"I know ye ain't Dace. I was jist a-sayin' it was too bad ye didn't."

"Dat's all right," growled Dace, "and it's a blamed shame ye didn't give the jay enough o' de sleep stuff in de first go, an' den dere wouldn't 'a' been no racket."

At that moment a tall, well-dressed man, with a long cloak wrapped about him, entered the saloon.

He walked about half-way back to where the two roughs sat, and then appearing suddenly to recognize them, paused and beckoned for them to come to him.

The two men rose from the table, growling as they did so.

"I wondah w'at's in de blow now," said Jim.

"Funny he can't fix t'ings heer."

"Oh, its de way wid dem chaps," grumbled Dace.

They approached the tall man and the three entered into an animated conversation, the two roughs appearing to be protesting against something in a vehement manner, and the tall man to be insisting upon some point with a cool firmness that seemed to be carrying the day.

Thad could hear nothing from where he sat, neither could he catch a glimpse of the tall man's face; he therefore rose and sauntered leisurely and with an unsteady step, as though he had had a drop too much, toward the door.

As he passed the trio he caught sight of the tall man's face, but did not recognize it.

Either he was in disguise, or he was somebody whom he had never seen before.

He overheard one of the toughs say as he passed them:

"Why not heer an' now, say?"

"Dat's de music," rejoined the other; "w'at's

de use o' runnin' all ovah town to fix a little mattah like dat?"

"Simple fact, gentlemen," said the tall man in a cold, hard voice, "that unless you accompany me and see that these things are placed in the right hands, you will receive no reward. You ought to know me by this time."

Thad strained his ears to hear more; but discretion would not allow him to remain within earshot any longer.

He also strove to think where he had heard that voice; but to save him he could not. It seemed as if notes here and there were familiar, but for the most part it was strange. And from the hard, metallic ring of it Thad concluded that it was assumed—disguised, as the owner's face probably was.

Scarcely had the detective got outside the door, when the three men came hurriedly out and started toward Sixth avenue.

They did not proceed far, however, when the tall man, quitting his companions and striding toward the curb, called a hack.

When the hack had driven to the curb the three men entered and were driven rapidly away.

While this was going on the detective was not idle.

The moment he discovered the tall man's intention, he hurried round the corner of Sixth avenue, and when he was out of their sight, got into a cab.

It was now fairly daylight; but the morning was cloudy and dark, so that objects could not be distinguished at any great distance.

As soon as Thad saw the hack come around the corner, he gave the word to the driver to follow it wherever it might go, and to keep at a respectable distance behind.

The hack proceeded up Sixth avenue for several blocks, and then turned toward the East River.

It continued in that direction for some time, until the river was in sight, and they were in the very worst part of the city.

Finally it stopped in front of a dingy tenement-house, and the three men alighted.

They stopped a few moments on the sidewalk to talk, and this gave the detective time to drive around the corner and get out without being observed by them.

He still retained his dinner pail, and the cabby remarked as he gave him the fare that he was "a very high-toned workin' man."

Thad sauntered along the street in the direction of the three men, but did not approach very near until they had finished their talk and entered the tenement-house.

Allowing them time to get fairly inside, the detective entered the hall, the door being open, just in time to see them reach the first landing.

Pretending to be very drunk he staggered up the stairs and reached the first landing just as they reached the second.

Here he paused until he saw them climb to the fourth floor and enter a door.

Fortune favored him here, for the second-floor flat was vacant and the door was open.

Hurriedly entering the flat, he ran back to the elevator, threw the door open, sprung in, grasped the rope, and in less time than it takes to tell it had pulled himself up to the fourth floor.

He was now in the private hall of the very flat that the men had entered.

Fortune favored him again here, for the men, in company with whoever occupied the flat, were in the front room, and talking so loudly, that there was little danger of their discovering him.

First entering the kitchen, he made his way thence into the dining-room, which was directly back of the sitting-room, or parlor, and was as dark as midnight.

Although a cheap tenement-house in a vile quarter of the city, the detective was surprised to find the flat comfortably, almost elegantly furnished.

An expensive *portiere* separated the sitting-room from the bedroom, which was comfortably furnished.

The detective concealed himself behind a dresser in one corner near the curtain, and where he could hear everything that was said in the front room.

The first one he heard speak was a woman.

"So you recovered the pin and the letter, did you?" she said.

"Yes, mother," replied a voice which the detective recognized as that of the tall man, "and it nearly cost a life to do it."

"Ha! ha! ha!" she laughed sardonically.

"What is a life more or less? If you hadn't got them, several of our lives would have been lost."

"No doubt," returned the tall man, dryly.

"Has she been here to-day?"

"No; and fearing that she would not keep her word, I went there last night."

"Did you get the money?"

"Yes."

"Well, pay these men, then, and let them go."

The woman made no reply, but rising, came into the bedroom where Thad was. She fumbled about for awhile in the drawer of the

dresser; but failing to find what she wanted, struck a match and lit the gas.

The next moment, as the light flooded the corner where Thad squatted, the woman caught sight of him!

A shrill scream rent the air the next instant.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN A TIGHT FIX.

THAD'S presence of mind stood him in good stead on this occasion.

Of course he knew that in less than a minute the three men would be upon him, and his chances, giant as he was, were slight against such odds.

There was no time to lose.

Whatever was to be done must be done at once, or all was lost.

And Thad was equal to the emergency.

With one hand he throttled the woman, so that she could not repeat her scream, and with the other turned out the gas.

He whispered in the woman's ear.

"Reveal my presence, and you are a dead woman; remain quiet and you are safe!"

With most women this would have been enough to seal their lips to all eternity, but this woman was used to dealing with desperate cases and circumstances; and after the first surprise was over, she became as calm as a May morning.

But all this, long as it takes to tell it, passed in a few seconds, so that Thad had no more than uttered his admonition when the three men bounded into the room.

"What is it, mother?" demanded the tall man.

"A man," she replied in a calm voice.

"A man? Where?"

"There!" she said, pointing into the dark corner.

Thad saw it was all up with him.

Concealment was no longer possible—he must fight.

"Come out of that, you scoundrel!" roared the tall man.

"Not till I'm taken out a dead man," came Thad's cool, deliberate voice.

"Take that, than," cried the tall man, at the same time discharging his revolver in the direction from which the voice came.

But if he imagined that Thad was such a fool as to remain in the same attitude as when he spoke, he was mistaken.

Scarcely had he uttered the words when he crowded down as near the floor as his huge form would allow.

The tall man's charge crashed harmlessly into the wall far above the detective's head.

The next instant he was on his feet again, and a deafening report from his revolver showed that he was still very much alive.

And his aim, dark as it was in the room, was less faulty than the tall man's had been.

Simultaneously with the roar of the detective's pistol came a cry of pain, and the tall man reeled and swayed for an instant, and fell crashing to the floor.

With a cry of rage the woman sprang at the detective like a tigress.

In her hand she grasped a long keen blade, and with it aimed a blow at the detective's body.

But his eyes had become sufficiently accustomed to the darkness by this time for him to see the action.

An agile spring to one side allowed the murderous knife to crash into the wall at one side of him.

Before the woman could recover herself, the detective had grasped her by the throat and hurled her to the floor.

But although rendered helpless by this action, the woman was neither cowed or made speechless.

Scarcely had she reached the floor when she yelled:

"Onto him, men! A thousand dollars for his life!"

The two roughs, who up to that moment had taken no part in the fray, were spurred on by this promise of reward.

They had no personal interest in the matter, and were too careful of their precious limbs to risk them in another man's fight.

But when there was a money consideration in sight, the case was different.

The man with two whole arms, that is, Jim, taking advantage of Thad's complication with the woman, made a lunge at him and planted a blow square in his face with his fist.

The action was so sudden and unexpected that the detective was taken completely by surprise.

The blow staggered him, and his feet becoming tangled up in the woman's dress as she lay in front of him, he fell forward, and would have fallen to the floor, had not the ruffian lent him another stinging blow just then on top of the head.

This had the effect of hurling him backward again, and although badly stunned he still maintained his senses, and braced by the wall behind him, kept his feet.

The ruffian made another stroke at him, but the detective succeeded in parrying it this time,

and dealt his antagonist a blow that sent him reeling to the floor.

This would have about ended the battle had it not been for the wounded man, Dace, who, taking advantage of Thad's attitude while his arm was extended, and his body thrown forward in dealing the blow to the ruffian, planted a sledge-hammer blow upon the detective's neck which staggered him considerably.

The woman was not idle in the mean time.

It seemed as if she had watched for this opportunity.

At all events as the detective's body swayed under the blow, she grasped his legs with all the strength of desperation, and, giving them a sudden wrench, succeeded in throwing him off his balance, and he fell to the floor.

The next instant the wounded man was on top of him, but Thad made short work of him.

One well-aimed blow sent him sprawling on his back.

The detective made an effort to regain his feet then, but to his discomfiture he found that the woman still clung to his legs.

He kicked with all his might and main to free himself, and would have soon succeeded; but the ruffian whom he had first knocked down, having just recovered himself and regained his feet, sprang upon him and clutched him by the throat.

A desperate struggle ensued.

The two men were pretty evenly matched, and the ruffian had the advantage of having the detective underneath.

To add to the detective's discomfiture, the woman still retained her hold upon his legs.

Notwithstanding these disadvantages, the detective held his own, and his tremendous power of endurance was fast telling on the strength of his antagonist.

Thad had broken the fellow's grasp on his throat, and in turn had got a firm grip on his throat.

Still the fellow struggled and fought like a wild beast, but his strength was fast going, and his breath was becoming short and labored. He must soon succumb unless assistance came to him.

But unfortunately for Thad, it came.

Just as the fellow seemed on the point of yielding—the detective had got him on his side—the woman suddenly released the detective's legs, and, grasping the knife which had fallen to the floor when Thad threw her down, sprang at the detective and aimed a deadly thrust at his heart.

The detective relaxed his grasp, the world swam before his vision for an instant, and then he became unconscious.

How long he remained thus he had no means of knowing.

When he finally came to, he found himself alone, bound hand and foot, and a gag in his mouth.

A severe headache and a dull pain in his side oppressed him.

He could not tell where he was, for it was pitch dark.

He listened intently for some time, but could hear nothing.

By a dexterous movement, he finally succeeded in shifting himself to one side a little, and became convinced that he was in a very small apartment of some kind.

The air was stifling and close, so that it was difficult to breathe.

He made a desperate effort to free his hands, but they were bound so tightly with small, strong cord, that he was not only unable to slip his hands out, but every effort only served to cause the cords to cut more deeply into the flesh.

That he was there to stay until somebody came to his assistance, there seemed not the shadow of a doubt.

But when could he hope for assistance to come?

Where was he?

Perhaps in some secluded place, where nobody would be likely to come for months.

Was he doomed to the slow and agonizing death of starvation?

It seemed so.

And if any one did come, it would, in all human probability, be his enemies, and his release would only be for the purpose of worse torture—maybe death.

In this situation his mind worked rapidly.

Most men would have succumbed to utter despair.

But Thad was ever hopeful, even in the darkest hour.

He cared little for himself in his extremity; but there was his family, and, above all, the great work he was engaged in—the unraveling of the mystery surrounding the murder of Sylvester Leland.

These, more than anything else nerved him to hope and effort.

As he rolled the stick used as a gag in his mouth, the detective made the discovery that the wood was not very hard, and he remembered that he had a powerful pair of jaws and teeth like iron.

He began, therefore, to chew upon the gag as a wild horse champs his bit.

Pretty soon he had the satisfaction of feeling the wood giving way under his teeth, and in a little while to split and crumble into fragments.

Spitting the tormenting gag from his mouth he felt relieved.

At this moment a happy thought occurred to him, and acting upon it, he raised his corded wrists to his mouth.

The cords were hard as iron, but he did not realize the fact.

His position was desperate and his efforts were those of desperation.

Gnawing with the vehemence of a caged rat he finally felt the cords yielding.

A few moments longer and enough of the strands had been rent to allow his hands to move with greater freedom. Still gnawing away with the will of desperation, he soon found the cords sufficiently relaxed to allow him to slip his hands out.

"Thank God!" he muttered, "now that my hands are free nothing can keep me in this thralldom."

This was more easily said than accomplished, however.

His feet were still tightly pinioned, which prevented the possibility of his rising.

He felt for his knife.

Fortunately in their attempt to disarm him the villains had overlooked a small sheath-knife of the Japanese pattern, which the detective carried for emergencies, inside of all his clothing, next to the skin.

Drawing this forth with a feeling of exultation, he was not long in severing the bonds that confined his lower limbs.

Now rising to his feet, he set about reconnoitering to ascertain where he was.

It did not take him long to discover that he was in a cell or closet scarcely more than four by six in extent, the walls of which were of stone and the door of solid oak.

Here was a situation!

The detective fumbled in his pockets for a match, and, finding one, lit his dark lantern, which had been put out in the late conflict.

Flashing his lantern around and surveying his surroundings, he found them anything but encouraging.

Solid stone walls surrounded him on three sides, and the oaken door on the fourth, against which his puny sheath-knife would be as impotent as a bean-shooter against a fortress, while the floor was also of stone and the ceiling solid oak.

The case was desperate.

Still he did not despair. There must be some means of escape.

As there was no lock in sight it must be on the outside, and there was no use of thinking of that.

He examined the walls minutely, leaving no seam or crevice unsearched. But the stone was laid in cement which had become as hard as the stone itself, and there was no chance of removing the slightest fragment.

Thad next turned his attention to the floor.

A series of vigorous kicks upon this told him that the pavement was laid upon a solid foundation, and that there was no opening beneath.

He looked long and earnestly at the ceiling; but even if there had been any means of effecting an opening through it, it was impossible to reach it, so high above his head was it.

Almost an hour had been consumed in this investigation, and he had about given up all hope of effecting an escape.

He also became conscious at that moment that he was ravenously hungry, which reminded him that he had had nothing to eat all day.

Once more he flashed his lantern about the floor, with no hope of making any new discovery, but just as a person will search a pocket the fiftieth time for a lost article he knows is not there.

But this time something caught his eye.

It was a small bolt-head imbedded in the rock and covered with dirt so that it was a thousand wonders he saw it.

And having found it, what did it amount to? At first he hardly considered it worth noticing, but moved by some spirit of curiosity, he finally stooped, and running the point of his knife under the edge of it, attempted to pry it up.

The loss of the point of his knife was all that he had for his pains.

Aggravated and angered at his stupidity, he jammed the now blunted knife down viciously upon the head of the stubborn bolt.

To his surprise the bolt-head yielded and sunk fully half an inch under the blows.

"This is strange," he mused. "I don't know that it will do me any good, but as I have nothing else to do, I guess I'll just see how far I can drive that thing."

With that he began to jab savagely at the bolt-head, which sunk lower and lower with each blow.

Finally when he had driven it about an inch below the surface, the stone upon which he squatted suddenly moved, slightly at first, and then turned half over, dropping the detective in an aperture, and landing him some six feet below upon a stone stair-case.

Flashing his light below he saw that the stairs descended a long ways, further than he could see, in fact, and without considering where they might lead, he began to descend.

Scarcely had he gone a dozen steps, however, when from a niche in the side of the wall stepped a man with a mask over the upper part of his face, and presenting two large revolvers, cried "Halt!"

CHAPTER IX.

LIVELY WORK.

THIS was an unexpected impediment, and took the detective completely by surprise.

For an instant he could not collect his wits sufficiently to act.

Neither man spoke, but Thad could see by the light of his lantern that there was an expression of cool determination on the man's face.

The detective was unarmed except for the little sheath-knife, which was a poor weapon against two revolvers.

Therefore his only chance lay in strategy.

Up to that moment the dark lantern had cast its mellow halo past the man upon the stone wall.

Thad's first move was to shut it off, leaving the place in utter darkness.

This seemed to disconcert the man, for he shifted uneasily.

The detective allowed a full minute to elapse, in which he scarcely breathed.

The stillness was awful.

He then suddenly flashed the light into the fellow's eyes with such a lightning movement that it astonished him.

It not only astonished him; it almost paralyzed him.

So great was his panic, in fact, that he threw up his hands as one does when shocked by a sudden peal of thunder.

That was Thad's opportunity, and he embraced it.

Making a quick, cat-like spring, he caught the fellow by his two uplifted wrists.

The shock of the detective's weight so suddenly hurled against him, threw the fellow off his balance, and the two men rolled down several steps together.

When they stopped rolling they had reached a landing or platform of some kind, and the detective was on top.

A fierce struggle followed.

The man was Thad's equal in strength, but it soon became evident that he lacked his power of endurance.

Besides, as the detective was on top and had his knee planted in his antagonist's stomach, together with having his hands pinioned, there was little chance for him.

It was not long before the fellow began to breathe heavily, and when the detective thought him about exhausted, he suddenly, and with a dextrous movement, let go his hold upon the fellow's wrists and clutched his throat with such a vise-like grip that he must have grown black in the face.

A moment's choking caused the fellow to become limp and nerveless, which warned the detective that he was unconscious.

Relaxing his grip, Thad rose and groped about in the darkness, until he found his lantern.

Flashing it along up the steps he found the two revolvers where the fellow had dropped them.

Putting one into his pocket and taking the other in his hand, he returned to his late adversary.

A flash of the light upon the upturned face showed it to be ghastly in the extreme. Still there was a twitching of the muscles that showed that life was not extinct, and as Thad watched him the fellow opened his eyes.

"Well, old fellow," said the detective good-naturedly, "how do you feel now?"

The fellow scowled, but made no reply.

"Come, get up," said the detective; "you are liable to catch cold there; besides, I want you to go along with me."

The fellow arose doggedly and staggered to his feet, but not without a great effort, as he was evidently very weak.

"What do you want?" growled the man.

"I want you, first of all," replied the detective, "to show me the way out of here."

"Come on, then," was the dogged response, and the two men proceeded to descend the stair-way, the stranger in the lead.

Down, down they went, until it seemed to Thad that they had reached the center of the earth, and finally came into a large, damp room that appeared to be the basement of a building, and the detective could hear walking and other signs of life overhead.

The place was partially lighted by a grating in the ceiling on one side, which led Thad to think that a portion of it must be under the sidewalk.

There were two doors, besides the one through which they had entered, and Thad was making toward the one nearest to him when he entered the room.

"Not that way," cried the fellow, excitedly.

"Why not?" demanded the detective.

"This is the way out," he said, nervously, pointing at the other door.

"Where does this door lead?" demanded the detective, becoming curious.

"No matter," said the man still more nervous, "this is the way out. I suppose that is what you want."

"Not just at present," said Thad. "I want to find out where this door leads."

"But you mustn't—that is—"

"Why mustn't I? Look here, my friend, you forget that I am boss now. You were a little while ago; but I am now, and you shall do as I say. Come, open that door."

"That I will not," demurred the other firmly.

"But I say you will," cried the detective just as firmly and considerably more savagely, brandishing his revolver in his face.

"I have no fear of you," said the fellow, coolly. "You may flourish your weapon, and use it too, for that matter; it doesn't worry me in the least, and I shall not open that door."

"Very well, then, lead the way out."

The fellow opened the other door with one of a bunch of keys and the two men stepped out into a corridor which the detective could see led directly to the street.

"Now, I'll leave you," said the fellow coolly.

"You can find your way out."

"Excuse me, sir," said Thad, "but I prefer that you should accompany me a little further—a good deal further, in fact."

"That is out of the question, I cannot do it."

"But I insist."

"That makes no difference."

"But you shall go—if not peaceably, then by force."

"Hal hal hal! That is good!" laughed the fellow. "Where do you want me to go?"

"For a little walk."

"To the police station, no doubt."

"Possibly."

"This is a joke."

"Then you refuse to go?"

"I do."

Without another word, and before the fellow had time to think, the detective had made a spring and throttled him.

A sharp struggle of a few minutes' duration followed, at the end of which the detective had his man down and the handcuffs on his wrists.

He then availed himself of the bunch of keys which the prisoner had dropped in the struggle.

"Now, get up and come on," commanded the detective.

The fellow rose to his feet, sullenly, but refused to move. The detective was used to dealing with stubborn characters, however.

Giving the prisoner a few sharp raps on the knuckles, which were behind his back, with the butt of his revolver, the latter moved off slowly but stubbornly.

They had not gone more than half the length of the corridor, when Thad heard a lively shuffling of feet inside the room which they had just left, and, looking around, he saw four big men hurrying toward the door leading into the corridor.

Of course he had no means of knowing whether they were after him or not, but he concluded it was best not to take any chances, so, with a gigantic bound, he sprung back to the door, thrust the key into the lock, and turned it.

Consternation and rage marked the faces of the baffled men, but they did not pause to discuss matters; they hurried away, and the detective felt sure that they intended to make their escape in some other direction, and cut off his retreat, if possible.

So, resorting to his former tactics, he hurried his prisoner along the corridor to the door, opened it, and, still urging his captive along by thumping his knuckles, hustled him up the steps.

When they reached the top, Thad found himself in a narrow, dirty, East-side street, very quiet just then.

He looked in every direction for a policeman, but none was to be seen.

It was growing dark, and the street lamps were already lit.

There was no time for delay, for he knew that the four men would be upon him in another minute at most.

As there were no policemen in sight, the only thing to be done was to march his prisoner to the station himself.

The detective gave his man another thump and started off with him.

From the fellow's actions, continually smiling sarcastically and glancing expectantly about, it was evident that he expected to be rescued before he had gone far, and, indeed, the detective began to apprehend the same thing, and urged his prisoner to greater speed.

Fortunately, the detective sighted a hack coming round the corner, and at once signaled the driver to approach, and that, too, in great haste.

The hackman took in the situation at a glance, and drove up to the curb.

The prisoner refused to enter the carriage,

notwithstanding Thad had knocked all the skin off his knuckles.

"Jump down here and help me put the prisoner in the back," said the detective to the driver, at the same time displaying his badge.

The driver, a big burly Irishman, descended from the box, and grasping the fellow by one arm, while the detective took the other, they hoisted him into the back.

Scarcely had the detective got inside, short as the time had been which all these events occupied, when the four men came running out and ordered the hackman to stop the hack.

He did slacken up, but Thad yelled at him to drive on as fast as he could, and he did so.

For some reason or other the men made no further efforts to get him to stop, but turned away grinning and winking at each other, a circumstance which looked very suspicious to the detective.

"What does it all mean?" he mused. "Does that driver intend to betray me? If so, it will be bad work for him."

As they rode along the detective tried to get a look at the prisoner's face; but he could only catch an imperfect view of it, owing to the dim and changing lights in the hack. Still he saw enough to make a mental note of his features.

He was satisfied he had never seen him before, and yet there were marks of resemblance to somebody he had seen.

The fellow had the height and nearly the figure of the tall man with whom he had had the encounter, only this man was much more slender.

But the voice, the face, the complexion, the color of the hair, the color and cut of the beard, were all different. And the eyes were entirely different.

The detective had noticed particularly that the tall man's eyes were very black and piercing, while this man's were a mild blue.

In vain he tried to discover some point of resemblance between him and some of the other parties connected with the case upon which he was working, and at one time he was almost sure that he saw something in the shape of his head resembling that of Harry Latour; but it was not strong enough to make any lasting impression with him, and he abandoned the theory.

Just at this point in his ruminations, the detective became aware that he was being driven across toward the West side, instead of downtown toward the inspector's office, where he wanted to go.

He put his head out of the window and demanded of the driver what he meant by driving in that direction.

The driver made no other reply than to whip up his horses and dash away in the same direction.

The detective leaned as far out the window as he could and leveling his revolver at the driver ordered him to stop or he would blow his brains out.

The prisoner was heard to chuckle at the detective's discomfiture.

Thad's threat had its desired effect, however. The driver came to a sudden halt.

"Now," cried the detective, "drive where I told you, or I'll lock you up with the prisoner."

The driver wheeled about, ostensibly for the purpose of driving back, but scarcely had he done so when as if by some preconcerted arrangement, four men—the same four that Thad locked in the cellar—stepped out, and presenting revolvers, ordered the driver to stop and Thad to surrender!

CHAPTER X.

IN CLOSE QUARTERS.

MOST men would have been completely overwhelmed by this situation, but Burr was not even rattled.

Springing out of the hack, he was on the box beside the driver in a twinkling.

Putting the muzzle of his pistol to the driver's head, he cried:

"Now drive, you scoundrel, or you're a dead man!"

"But the men—" stammered the driver, white as a ghost.

"Never mind them," interrupted the detective. "Drive this instant, or off comes your head!"

The driver needed no more urging.

It was evident that he feared for his life if he did drive; but frightened as he was, he could not fail to realize that he stood a better chance with men twenty feet away than with a pistol against his ear.

He therefore did not hesitate an instant longer, but laying the lash upon the horses they tore away from the men who were holding their bits, and dashed off like the wind.

To the detective's surprise the men made no further resistance and no effort to detain the hack longer, but he was too much absorbed in looking after the driver to notice what they did after the hack started.

For several minutes the hack dashed on down

town, the frightened driver at the continual instigation of the detective, lashing the horses at every jump.

It was but a few minutes at this break-neck speed when the hack pulled up in front of the inspector's office.

Thad leaped down from the box to look after his prisoner.

Hastily throwing open the door he peered in. The next instant his face was suffused with mingled disappointment and rage.

The prisoner was gone!

"Come down off that box!" he roared a moment later to the driver.

The driver, trembling in every limb, hastily complied.

"Now," said the detective, scarcely able to suppress his rage, "where is that prisoner?"

"Pon me sowl, sor, Oi don't—"

"Don't lie to me, you scoundrel. Why did you drive me in the wrong direction in the first place, sir?"

"Faith, sor, an' Oi didn't know—"

"Come, none of that, my man," commanded the detective. "You've got yourself into a bad box, and the best thing you can do is to make a clean breast of it. Come inside."

The driver secured his horses and trembling and pale entered the office with the detective.

As it happened the inspector was not there, so Thad, securing the services of one of the clerks to record the driver's statements, proceeded to cross-question him.

After going through with the usual formalities of getting the name, age, etc., the detective said:

"Now, Pat, I want you to tell me the truth, for if you don't we will find it out and it will cost you a good many years of imprisonment. Do you know who that man we had in the back was?"

"No, sor," replied the Irishman in a tone of earnestness mingled with fear, that it was impossible to doubt that he told the truth.

"Well, sir, that was a murderer," exclaimed the detective, putting all possible stress upon his words.

"Murder av Moses!" cried the Irishman, growing a shade paler, if possible.

"Yes, sir. And do you know the penalty for assisting a murderer to escape?"

"Dade an' Oi don't, sor."

"Anywhere from twenty years to a life's imprisonment."

"Murder an' oons!"

"And that is what you have been guilty of," continued the detective, sternly.

"But, sor, Oi didn't know nuthin' about him bein' a murderer."

"You know the men who hired you to drive me in the wrong direction, don't you?"

"Faith, sor, an' Oi don't."

"What?"

"Lishten, sor, an' Oi'll tell yez all about it, upon me sowl, Oi will."

"All right, go ahead. But remember, if you don't tell the truth, it will be a serious matter for you."

"Dade, sor, an' it's the truth thot Oi'll be tellin' yez at all. Well, sor, Oi was sthandin' wid me back furnist a saloon an Avenue A, an' Oi was feelin' purty blue, fur divil a fare had Oi picked up the blessed day, whin all at wunst a man came rushin' out av the saloon an' axed me did Oi want ter make tin dollars aisy. 'Will a duck shwim?' sez Oi. 'Thin,' sez he, 'dhroive around ther carner,' sez he, 'an' whin yez see a man,' sez he, 'wid another man wid cuffs anto 'im, an' he beckons yez to cam to 'im, take 'im in quick an' dhroive to West Thirty-third strate; but moind,' sez he, 'that yez don't get there too soon,' sez he."

"What did he mean by that?" asked the detective.

"Faith an' Oi kin tell yez now, but divil a wurred did Oi know thin, fur Oi didn't know they was the murderin' spalpeens thot they air, thin."

"Well, what did they mean, now that you know what kind of men they are?"

"They mint thot Oi sh'ud dhroive in a round-about way so's they c'ud b'ate me to the sphot."

"And you did it?"

"Faith an' Oi did, sor. Whin a man takes a fair be's got ter dhroive phere he's tould an' ax no questions."

"Did you suspect that nothing was wrong?"

"Whoy sh'ud Oi, sor?"

"The fact of their telling you to drive one place and I, who occupied the hack, telling you another, should have warned you that something was wrong."

"Oh, bedad, sor, but they tould me furrest; and thin it's not an uncommon thing fur the fri'nds av a stranger in town to engage a hack for him, an' tell us phere ter dhroive, an' thin the stranger'll tell us something else, an' divil the notice do we take at all av the stranger's orders."

"So you never saw these men before?"

"Pon me sowl, Oi niver did, sor."

"Nor the man we had in the hack either?"

"Niver."

"Do you think you could identify the man who gave you your orders about the hack?"

"Dade an' Oi c'ud, sor."

"Will you drive me back to that saloon and identify the men, if they are there?"

"Shure."

"All right, come on; if you prove yourself innocent of any complicity with these rascals I'll set you at liberty, otherwise I'll have to lock you up."

When they got out to the hack the driver opened the door for the detective to enter.

"Never mind," said Thad, "I'll ride on the box with you. I have some other passengers for the inside."

"Other passengers, sor?" said the Irishman in surprise.

"Yes; here they come."

And as the driver turned to look, four policemen walked up and climbed into the hack.

The detective and the driver climbed upon the box and the latter drove off.

Some minutes later they pulled up at the saloon and Thad jumped down.

"Come with me," said he, addressing the driver, after instructing the policemen to remain where they were until called upon.

A moment later the driver, according to directions, entered the saloon alone.

The detective strolled in a little later, having made a little alteration in his make-up and pulled his slouch hat down over his eyes.

When he slouched up to the bar in an apparently intoxicated state, his best friend would not have recognized him, and it is no wonder that the driver, whom he had just left, did not.

The detective was somewhat surprised at the conversation which he overheard between the driver and barkeeper.

"Well, you've got back," said the latter.

"Whist!" cried the driver, raising his finger in a warning manner and glancing uneasily toward the screen in front of the door. "Be aisy, there's a smeller about. Spake low, d'ye moind."

"All right," said the barkeeper doggedly. "Well, did ye land yer party where Bill told ye to?"

"Divil a bit av it; but the other made his sn'ake all roight."

"How did it happen?"

"Oi can't be tellin' yez now, for as Oi tould yez, there's a smeller about, an' he'll be onto us afore we knows it. Phere is Bill now?"

"Up-stairs," replied the barkeeper. "Him and the boss is havin' a confab about something or other."

"How soon will he be down d'ye think?" asks the Irishman.

"I can't tell. He may not be down here at all. The chances are he'll go to dinner purty soon."

"Phere does his lardship doine at all?"

The barkeeper gave the address in so low a tone that the detective couldn't hear what it was.

"He promised ter pay me as soon as Oi got back," said the driver in a disappointed voice.

"That's all right. He left the dust wid me," said the barkeeper, tossing out a ten-dollar bill.

Thad waited to hear no more.

Gliding out of the saloon so quietly that he wasn't observed, he instructed two of the policemen to go into the saloon and arrest the hackman, and the other two to remain within call, in case he should want them.

Taking out a few articles which he had thrown into the hack, the detective changed his hat and coat, and replaced the neck-whiskers which had done service when he was acting the part of a workingman, by a full beard.

He then went to the side-entrance of the basement and unlocking it went in.

Flashing his dark-lantern about the room, he saw that the coast was clear, and so proceeded to the door which his captive had refused to tell him anything about.

He soon found a key that would open it, and a moment later found himself at the foot of a flight of stairs.

Without hesitating a moment, the detective began to ascend the stairs.

He climbed until it seemed to him that he had reached the attic of the tallest building in New York, when he came into a narrow corridor, so narrow that only one person could pass through it at one time.

Following this up for some distance he suddenly came bang up against what appeared to be a wall. He had traveled in the dark, for the lantern was too conspicuous a mark for possible hidden foes, which accounted for his running into the wall.

He flashed his lantern now, however, and found that to all appearances the corridor was actually walled up with solid stone.

This was a disappointment, but when he thought the matter over for a moment, he felt confident that there must be some outlet, else why should his captive have been so nervous about his entering the door below?

Maybe it might be along the side somewhere, or at the other end of the corridor.

The detective retraced his steps, and examined every inch of the wall on both sides, and at the other end, but to no purpose. There was no sign of a door anywhere.

Again returning to the terminus of the hall, he made a second and more thorough examina-

tion, but at the end of half an hour he had arrived at the conclusion that there was no outlet.

He was about turning away in disgust, when it occurred to him that he had not examined the floor.

Flooding the floor in the immediate end of the hall, he began to examine it minutely, and was rewarded before long by finding a bolt-head similar to the one in the cage in which he had been imprisoned, except that this one stood an inch above the floor, instead of being sunk below, like the other one.

This led the detective to think that this one must be pulled up instead of pushed down, and so he grasped it with his thumb and finger and gave it a vigorous pull.

The next instant a portion of the floor, two feet and a half square, glided to one side, revealing a flight of steps below.

"This is a funny arrangement," mused Thad. "You go up only to go down again."

But he had not to go far down.

There were only half a dozen steps, and when he reached the bottom of these he found himself in another corridor, which ran in another direction.

Following this a short distance, he came to a door, which was locked; but, fortunately, one of his keys unlocked it.

He now found himself in a small room with a bed and some other furniture in it, all of an elegant character, and he could hear voices in the next room.

Thad was in somewhat of a quandary now; for he could not hear the voices in the next room distinctly enough to tell what they were saying, and he knew it was risky business going in upon the speakers without knowing how things were situated.

Finally he hit upon a piece of strategy.

He first turned the knob of the door very softly and it came open a little ways without attracting any attention.

Next he tied a piece of twine to the knob and placing himself at the back of the room, gradually pulled the door open.

It was very dark in the room where he was, and as there was a light in the other room he could see the occupants without being seen himself.

To his surprise it was the same flat where he had had the fight with the tall man, and that gentleman in the flesh was sitting at a table (it was the dining-room into which Thad was looking) with several other men and one woman!

CHAPTER XI.

AGAINST ODDS.

So softly had the door been opened that the people at table did not notice the occurrence.

From his point of observation the detective had an excellent opportunity of examining the faces of the people.

First of all, there was the tall man who appeared to be a ruling spirit and everybody looked up to him as though he had been a king.

Then there were four or five ordinary-looking men, low-browed and vulgar to the last degree.

But what interested the detective most were two women, or rather a woman and a girl. The first was a woman of perhaps fifty, but bright and vigorous, and still retaining something of what had once evidently been a dazzling beauty; though time, and perhaps sin, had left their traces in certain hard, cynical lines about the face, which showed that sympathy had long since ceased to have an abiding place there.

The girl was possibly twelve or fourteen years of age, although she was so thin and emaciated that she did not appear to be more than ten. She was a bright blonde, her hair being almost the color of flax, long and disheveled, and, standing out about her tallowy-white face in tangled, fluffy masses, resembled the pale nimbus of a very pale saint. Her eyes were very large and, remarkable as it may appear, black as jet. The detective was not surprised, therefore, when he heard her addressed and referred to by every one as the "Specter."

She appeared to occupy the position of a slave in this household, and every one seemed to take a delight in, or consider it his duty to, tease or torture the poor creature. The girl had a habit, when driven to the verge of despair or fearing death from some of her brutal tormentors, of crossing her thin, white hands upon her breast and rolling her eyes up, which to a sympathetic person would have been pathetic, but which was a source of a great deal of merriment to these people. They would torture the poor creature until she would do this, and then roar with laughter at the sight.

This was what they were engaged in, together with eating, when the detective opened the bedroom door.

The girl was waiting on the table, and when she would come near any of the guests to hand them anything they delighted in pinching her poor, emaciated arms or striking her knuckles with a knife. This made the girl nervous and she often spilled things, which invariably brought a pounding on the head from the old woman.

The detective watched their performance until he was worked up into almost a frenzy of rage and disgust, and yet he could do nothing, against such odds, for the poor girl.

What added to his anger, was his own physical agony. He had had nothing to eat for nearly twenty-four hours, and the sight and smell of the victuals aggravated the pangs of hunger, which in his excitement he had forgotten.

Besides this there was a dull pain in his left side where the woman had struck him with the knife—the latter having been warded off and prevented from entering his heart by something which he had not had time to ascertain.

Finally the girl brought the tall man, whom the balance of the company called Cap, a cup of coffee. Just as she went to put it down she saw, or imagined she saw, some one about to pinch her, and jumping back, upset the coffee into the tall man's lap.

The poor creature knew she was in for it then, and shrinking into a corner, crossed her hands upon her breast and raised her eyes imploringly to heaven.

It was a pitiful sight, enough to wring the heart of an ordinary mortal, but the only effect it had upon these people was to make them shout with laughter.

All but the tall man. He did not laugh. Jumping from his seat, his face white and corrugated with rage, he grasped the trembling girl by the hair. Then, with a volley of oaths, he dragged her about the room for a moment, and stopped in front of the bedroom with his back to the door.

The girl's screams were heartrending, but appeared to be very amusing to these people, for they laughed until the tears ran down their cheeks.

"Oh, don't kill me!" shrieked the poor girl, frantic with pain and terror. "I didn't mean to do it—indeed, I didn't."

"Why shouldn't I kill you, you miserable brat? Curse you, I ought to have killed you long ago!"

"Oh, mercy, mercy! Please, captain, don't kill me! I'll do anything you say if you will only spare my life!"

"Curse you, no; I'm going to kill you. You've been a curse to me ever since you were born, and I'm going to put an end to you now!"

With that he clutched the girl by the throat with his left hand and raised the clinched fist of the right to deal her the death-blow.

The girl uttered a low piteous cry and closed her eyes to meet her fate.

"Now die, curse you!" cried the tall man, as he threw all the strength of his body into that one arm.

But it never descended.

Before it had time to do anything of the kind the detective dealt him a blow on the back of the neck that laid him prostrate upon the floor.

The detective's next action was to snatch the girl, pull her into the room and push her behind him.

She was so frightened that had she been inclined to scream, as most girls would under the circumstances, she had not the power to do so.

But lest she should be inclined to do anything of the kind, Thad whispered a word of warning in her ear, at the same time assuring her that she should not be hurt if she kept quiet.

The poor creature shrunk trembling into the corner of the room and never uttered a syllable.

Meanwhile the other three men and the woman appeared to be temporarily paralyzed with astonishment at the unexpected turn of affairs, and stood motionless, regarding the detective as though he had been some supernatural being.

The woman was the first to regain her self-possession.

It was not the first time that day that she had found a stranger in her apartments, and she was not so much surprised as the others.

It may be, too, that she had a suspicion that this was the same man they had overpowered in the morning and confined in the cage.

At all events, after the first agitation of surprise had subsided, she glared at the detective like an infuriated tigress, for a moment, and then turning to the three burly ruffians, she hissed, rather than said:

"Away with him, men! What are you standing there for, like a lot of children?"

But the three men, after contemplating the detective's gigantic form and cool bearing, did not appear inclined to attack him, and stood irresolute.

This infuriated the woman, and she stormed furiously, while her black eyes fairly blazed with pent-up rage.

"Cowards!" she hissed. "Three of you against one, and you dare not attack him! What are you made of, anyway? I, at least, am not afraid of him!"

With that she snatched a huge carving-knife from the table and rushed at the detective.

When within a yard of him she raised her knife and threw all her strength into her arm for the blow.

Had Thad become the least bit nervous it might have resulted seriously for him; but his coolness never for a moment forsook him, and when the deadly blow was about descending he made a quick movement and grasped her wrist with a grip of iron.

The woman struggled and howled with rage, but to no purpose; she might as well have attempted to free herself from a vise.

However, she succeeded in engaging the detective's attention so that he did not notice the actions of the three men, and he had become oblivious of their presence until one of them stole up and aimed a blow at his head with his fist.

Fortunately Thad saw the shadow of the impending blow in time to dodge it; but the momentum of it threw the fellow's weight upon the detective, and at the same time the ruffian clutched the detective by the throat.

This caused Thad to relax his grip upon the woman's arm somewhat; and she took advantage of it to slip her arm out; but Thad tightened his grasp again just in time to clutch the keen blade with his naked hand, which lacerated it severely. However, he succeeded in wrenching the knife from her hand, and it flew over his shoulder into the room behind him.

He then turned his undivided attention to the man, and a short but sharp struggle followed, at the end of which the ruffian lay at the detective's feet with the tall man.

This seemed to infuse a little life into the other two men, who, drawing their knives, rushed upon him, backed by the woman.

The detective saw that his chances against such odds were slender, unless he resorted to something more than the means nature had given him, so drawing his revolvers he cocked and aimed them at the on-coming ruffians, and cried:

"Stand back!"

The foremost did not heed the command, and he pulled the trigger.

The villain leaped into the air with a howl of pain and rage, and then reeled to the floor.

This had the effect of dampening the courage of the other, and he threw down his knife and fled like a jack-rabbit.

The woman alone stood cool and undaunted.

She advanced within a few feet of the detective, and looking him coldly in the eye for a moment, said:

"Well, you've conquered these puny creatures, but you haven't conquered me. I am not afraid of you."

"You have no right to be, madam," said Thad, "so long as you keep your distance. I have been on the defensive all along."

"You lie!" she hissed. "Do you mean to say you were on the defensive when you laid him low?" she said, pointing at the tall man. "No; you not only attacked him unprovoked, but you struck him from behind like the coward that you are."

"Even in his case, madam, I was on the defensive, not of myself, but of a poor defenseless creature, whom nobody but the craven coward that lies there would have abused as he was abusing her, and doubtless would have murdered had I not interfered."

"Shel!" the woman sneered. "He had a right to abuse and even murder her if he chose. It was a great piece of heroism to kill a noble gentleman like him for such a creature as she! Do you know what she is?"

"I do not, nor do I care. I only know that she is a weak, defenseless girl, and that all you brutal people were rendering her wretched lot as much more wretched as possible. This I saw and endured as long as I could, and then when that brute lying there threatened her life and attempted to put his threat into execution I could stand it no longer. If he had been a king and she a slave I would have done the same thing, and as he was only a criminal—"

"What do you mean?" interrupted the woman, turning pale.

"Just what I say, that this man is a criminal—a murderer, and I have every reason to believe that you are his accomplice!"

The woman was in a perfect frenzy of rage in an instant.

Snatching up the knife dropped by the fallen ruffian, she dashed at him, crying:

"Retract that, or I'll—"

"Stand back!" yelled the detective. "I do not want to hurt you if I can avoid it; but I must defend myself from even a woman!"

She paid no attention to his warning, but rushed on at him, so furious had she become.

Seeing that he could not reason with her, the detective watched his opportunity, and again as she attempted to plunge the knife into him, aimed a blow at her wrist, which not only sent the knife spinning into the air, but benumbed her hand so that she could no longer handle a knife.

She howled with pain and rage, and seemed less subdued than ever.

The detective, taking advantage of her discomfiture, however, rushed on her with the cocked revolvers, and demanded her surrender.

She looked at him with withering contempt, as she uttered in low, measured tones:

"Surrender? Never, while I have a drop of blood left! You have brutally murdered my son, and, now, do you expect me to surrender? Never!"

She evidently did not count upon the detective's tactics, for as she finished her speech she turned her back upon him.

This was, above all things, what he could have desired.

As she started to stride away, she allowed her hands to fall to her sides, and it was the easiest matter in the world for him to grasp them, pull them behind her, and snap the handcuffs upon her wrists.

Her fury was something frightful when this was accomplished.

She fumed and raved like a maniac, but as she could do no damage, Thad paid no attention to her. His business was with the tall man.

Stooping over him to ascertain whether he was still alive or not, the detective found to his surprise that he was not only alive but perfectly conscious. Moreover, he had got hold of the carving-knife which had fallen in the bedroom, and in a minute more would evidently have sprung upon the detective unawares, had he not arrived at the instant he did. Thad soon pinioned him down and slipped the handcuffs upon him. He then handcuffed the unconscious ruffian, and taking the girl with him, locked the interesting party in the room.

When he got down-stairs he gave the keys to one of the policemen and told them to go up and take the trio to the station.

CHAPTER XII.

A RAY OF LIGHT.

THE girl went with the detective, shivering and cringing, apparently afraid to accompany him, and afraid to refuse.

His mind was so much taken up with his prisoners that he didn't notice her for awhile, but when he had beckoned for a hack and was waiting for it to drive up he turned to look at his *protégée*.

She cringed away from him as though he had raised his hand to strike her.

"What's the matter, girl?" he asked in surprise.

"Oh, sir," she said in a low, frightened voice, "what—what are you going to do with me?"

"Why, my poor child, I'm going to take you some place where you will be taken care of."

"Well—will they beat me and pinch me, and—"

"No, my poor child, you shall be taken good care of. The people will be kind to you, give you plenty to eat and nice clothes to wear, and a good bed to sleep in."

"But—but—" she stammered, suddenly turning very pale. "Please, sir, I mustn't go with you. I—I—can't go with you."

"Why not?" asked the detective in surprise.

"Because the captain will find me and bring me back, and then he will kill me. He said he would kill me if I ever went off with anybody else."

"Don't worry about the captain, my poor girl," said the detective kindly. "He is locked up in jail by this time, or soon will be."

"But the misses, she will find me, and she is just as bad as the captain."

"I believe you, my girl," said Thad, laughing, "and for that reason I have had her locked up too."

"Oh, but they won't stay locked up," cried the girl with a still more frightened look.

"I guess they will," said Thad, reassuringly.

"Oh, sir, but you don't know them as I do," cried the girl, wringing her hands despairingly.

At this point the hack arrived, and with much reluctance she was persuaded to get in and they drove away.

He went to his studio, having ordered a bounteous repast sent up.

When the table was set in Thad's little dining-room, loaded with every delicacy that a hungry man could wish, the detective turned to the still cringing girl, and said:

"Come, child, let us eat. I am as hungry as a wolf, and you can't be much better."

"Oh, sir," said the girl, "when you are done, sir, I am never allowed to eat with the rest."

"My poor child, that was when you were with those brutal people. Now you are with a friend."

"Friend?" she repeated, with a look of wonder. "Why, sir, I thought only grand people like the captain had friends."

"Ah, such men as he have friends only to the extent of their money or power; your friends are such through sympathy and pity, and after awhile, maybe, when you have learned to trust people and ceased to shrink away when they wish to befriend you, they will love you."

"This is all very strange, sir," she cried, with the wondering, staring eyes of a child. "Nobody ever spoke to me like that before. It seems just like dreams I have had of my beautiful mother."

"Then you remember your mother?"

"Oh, no, sir; it was only a dream. I never had any mother, but I dreamed it so often, and the beautiful lady always looked the same, that

I got to believe it was true, and spoke of it once to the madam."

"What did she say?"

"She said that I was a fool; that I never had a mother."

"Then she lied; you have, or have had a mother, my poor child, and if she is still living, we will find her," said the detective, vehemently.

"Find my mother?" cried the girl, in ecstasies. "Oh, sir, if you will, I will work and slave for you the rest of my life."

"No, you won't, my poor girl; I won't permit it. It will be too great a pleasure for me to find your mother, and, if she is a good woman, make you both happy. But, come, sit down and eat your dinner."

The girl sat down timidly and began to eat, in a frightened way, the food Thad put upon her plate. He induced her to drink a little wine, and by continued acts of kindness, coupled with cheerful and lively conversation, little by little, won her confidence, and before the meal was over she began to act almost like any other child. It was also evident that something was born in her heart which had long, if not always, been a stranger to it, and that was affection. In fact, she began to feel toward Thad something of what a child feels for its parents, or probably more like what a dog feels for an affectionate master.

After the meal was over the girl had become quite cheerful and talkative, and Thad noticed that she was very beautiful, and resembled somebody he had seen, but whom he could not at first make out.

Then, suddenly, it came to him. Heavens! could it be true? And yet there was no doubt of it. She was the very picture of Lillian Leland!

She was very diffident about speaking of those with whom she had lived; but Thad managed to gradually draw her out.

He had a theory now that this girl was going to be of great profit to him in unraveling the tangled mystery upon which he was at work.

That the tall man and the old woman (who was doubtless his mother) were either directly responsible for, or implicated in the murder of Sylvester Leland, he had not the least doubt; why else should they be so anxious to obtain possession of the fatal scarf-pin and the letter?

Allowing this premise, the girl who had either been raised by them or been in their custody for a long time, must have overheard something at one time and another that would throw some light upon the subject.

His plan now, therefore, was to keep the girl, treat her with all the kindness of a father, and, if possible, elicit enough information from her to lead him to the heart of the mystery.

When he had succeeded in inducing her to go into his little parlor with him without stopping to wash up the dishes, as she insisted upon doing, he put a pretty chain about her neck and gave her several other simple presents which completely won her heart, child that she was.

Having thus prepared the way, he began his catechism.

"What is your name, my child?" he asked.

"I don't know, sir," she replied. "It seems to me that I remember of being called Lily a long time ago; but the captain and the misses and all their friends called me the Specter."

"Well, you will not be called the Specter any longer. I will call you Lily."

"Another link," thought the detective. The resemblance might be coincident; but the theory was now backed up by the girl having the same name.

"But they won't allow me to be called Lily," protested the girl, something of the scared look returning to her face.

"Never mind those people, my child, you are done with them forever. Well, Lily," he continued in a tender voice, "how long have you lived with the captain?"

"Oh, I never lived with the captain," she said with more spirit than he could have given her credit for. "I lived with the misses."

"Don't the captain live in the same house with the misses?"

"No, sir, he only comes there sometimes."

"How long have you lived with her?"

"I don't know, sir. I only remember that a long time ago I lived with a very ugly old woman, who was poor but very kind. She taught me to speak correctly, and also taught me my prayers. Then some men took me away one night, all rolled up in cloaks, and the next I remember I was with the misses."

"What is the misses's name?"

"Curtis. The people that visit there call her Mother Curtis."

"What is the captain's name?"

"Curtis, too. He's the misses's son."

"Does the captain always appear the same when he comes in?"

"No, sir. Sometimes he has black hair, sometimes, white, sometimes red or blonde; and then sometimes he has a full beard, sometimes side-whiskers, and sometimes only mustache. I only know him by his voice."

"Why does he disguise himself in that way?"

"The misses says it is necessary to keep bad men, who want to kill him, from knowing him."

"Do they ever have any visitors who look to be respectable people?"

"Oh, sir," she cried, her face assuming its old frightened expression again, "I dare not tell you that. I have told you too much already. They will kill me! Indeed they will."

"No, no, my child," said the detective, in a soothing voice, "they shall not harm you. Remember I am your friend."

"I know, but—"

"Have you forgotten that I saved your life, and that, too, at the risk of losing my own?"

"Oh, no, sir, I have not forgotten it," she cried, her face growing calmer again. "And are you sure you won't let the captain or the misses find me?"

"Of course I am sure. They are locked up in jail now, and if you will answer my questions I will be able to keep them there. Now tell me; do they have such visitors as I described?"

"Ye—yes, sir, a great many of them."

"Can you describe any of them?"

"I can only remember two. One is a young man, rather handsome but a little gray; and the other is a young lady that always comes closely veiled, but I saw her face once."

"What was she like?"

"Oh, so beautiful! Just like the mamma I have dreamed about."

"Was she light or dark?"

"Light, and oh, such lovely hair and eyes!"

Thad arose, and going to his dresser in the next room, brought a hand-mirror.

This he held before the girl's face, and asked:

"Did she look like that?"

"Why, sir—why," stammered the girl, overcome with astonishment, "she—she *did* look like that. Oh, sir, you don't think—"

"I am sure of it," said the detective, earnestly. "That woman is your mother!"

"Oh—oh—it—it cannot be, sir," she almost shrieked in her wild joy.

"But it can be. Now, listen. You say she was always closely veiled?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you were not allowed to see her?"

"No, sir. It was by accident I came into the room and saw her once, and the misses hustled me out as quick as she could."

"Did the lady see you?"

"No, sir."

"Did they ever explain why you must not see her?"

"Yes, sir; they told me that she was a very bad woman, and that if she saw me she would kill me."

"That settles it," said the detective, reflectively. "Either she thinks you are dead and desires that such should be the case, or else you have been taken from her against her will, and the parties interested do not wish her to know of your existence. Whatever the truth is, we shall find it out, my girl."

The detective was silent a moment, and his mind was busy with the complex mystery into which he had plunged.

As he looked back upon the events of the past week and saw how little progress he had made, his heart sunk within him.

Again and again he said to himself:

"Is there any end to it? Or must I go on and on thus forever, getting deeper and deeper into mystery, with not one ray of hope for its abatement?"

While reflecting thus he had sat with his face buried in his hands. At this point he raised his head to look at the girl.

To his surprise she was gone.

A hasty search of the premises, however, discovered her in the dining-room busily engaged in washing dishes.

"They will soon be done, sir," she cried, with a frightened look.

"I don't care a rap if they are not done to-night, my child," he said, laughing. "Indeed, I did not intend that you should wash the dishes."

"I would rather do it, sir," she said.

"Very well, you may finish, now that you have commenced. But as soon as you are through come into the other room; I want to talk to you."

"All right, sir."

Thad had sat but a few minutes when she came gliding timidly in.

"I say, Lily," said Thad, "you mustn't act that way in my presence. I'm your friend you remember, and friends are frank and open with each other. Do you not think you can trust me?"

"Yes, sir," said the child, brightening up.

"Very well, sit down. Now, in future I want you to think of me as your father and I will treat you just the same as though you were my daughter. I have a daughter at home about your age, and you shall know her. Lily," he went on, after a pause, "did you ever hear any of the conversation between this pretty lady and the captain or the misses?"

"Not much, sir," she replied. "Sometimes, I would catch a word or two. You see, sir, they always shut me in the little room where you were, when visitors came. I didn't want to listen because they told me if I did they would

kill me; but it was so dark and lonesome in there, and so quiet, that I couldn't help it sometimes."

"Has this lady been there lately?"

"Yes, sir; two days ago."

"Did you hear say anything about a pin?"

"Yes, sir. They talked a great deal about it. They said that if it was not recovered somebody would hang."

"You do not know whom?"

"No, sir."

"Did they say anything about a letter?"

"Yes, sir. They said *that* must be recovered too."

"Why?"

"Because it was the same writing as some paper which the misses has in her strong box, and which they called Double-X."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE STRONG BOX.

THE proverbial thunder from a clear sky could not have astonished the detective any more than the last words of the girl.

Here was a real clue, and no mistake.

The very thing, above all others, that he was looking for had turned up unexpectedly.

He was so elated that he could hardly contain himself for a moment.

At last he mastered his enthusiasm, and went on with his interrogatories.

"Are you sleepy, Lily?" he asked, to start with.

"No, sir," she replied. "It seems so good to have some one talk to me without scolding, that I wouldn't get tired all night."

"I do not know why any one should scold you, Lily," returned Thad, kindly, "and I can only wonder at the depravity of those people who abused you."

"You are very good and kind, sir," she said, warmly. "I am sure I shall be very happy if I can always be near you."

"I hope you may," rejoined Thad, earnestly; "or what is better, with your own mother."

"Oh, sir, I don't think I shall like my mother as well as I do you."

"I hope you will, and a great deal better. By the way, speaking of the misses's strong box, do you know where she keeps it?"

"Yes, sir, she keeps it in a cabinet."

"Where is the cabinet?"

"In the front room."

"How large is the box?"

"About so big," she replied, indicating dimensions with her hands about six by ten inches.

"What is the box made of?"

"Iron, sir."

"Very well. Now, you had better go to bed, Lily. You may occupy the bed in the bedroom and I will sleep in here on the lounge."

"Oh, sir, hadn't I better sleep on the lounge?" the girl protested. "I have never been allowed to sleep in a bed in my life."

"All right, surprise yourself to-night," laughed the detective. "I'll sleep on the lounge, as I want to wake early in the morning."

The girl offered no further protest, and retired to the little bedroom.

It was not far from midnight, but late as it was Thad could not sleep until he had learned how the policeman had got along with his two prisoners.

So as soon as the girl had gone he locked the place up securely and altering his make-up to that of a successful sport, he sallied forth.

"Now," mused Thad, "after I have seen that my prisoners are all right, I'll take a run up to the rooms they recently occupied and see if I can find that strong box."

Jumping into a cab he was soon at the police station where the prisoners were to be taken.

He shook up the drowsy watchman on duty, and in answer to his description of the prisoners, was assured that they were safely stowed away in cells.

"Good," thought Thad; "now I'll go for the strong box, as the coast will be clear."

It just then occurred to him that one of the policemen had taken the bunch of keys, and he returned to the station to see if they had been left there for him. Fortunately they had and he was soon in possession of them.

He then took a cab and drove to the house or flat lately occupied by Mother Curtis.

The detective was comparatively sure that there would be no obstacle in his way, and yet he thought it just as well to enter through the secret passage. But when he got into the corridor leading into the basement he found an iron bar across the door.

This put an end to that mode of entrance and the only way left him was the front door.

This made little difference, unless the neighbors were in sympathy with the prisoners and should attempt to prevent his getting in.

His first drawback was when he found that the bunch of keys did not include one for the front room.

This necessitated ringing up the janitor, who asked a world of questions.

He finally satisfied the janitor, however, by partly answering his questions and slipping a dollar into his hand.

Once past this barricade he lost no time in making his way up to the third floor where the flat was located.

It was with a light heart the detective put the key into the lock, but before he had turned it his feelings changed.

His quick ear caught the sound of footsteps inside as plainly as he had ever heard footsteps in his life.

It would not do to go back, though, having gone this far.

But how should he proceed?

Nobody knew better than himself the rashness of entering a room, unbidden, especially when you have good reason to believe that the room is occupied by an enemy.

Still, there was a chance of the occupant or occupants being in some other part of the house, so that he could open the door without being heard, and once inside he had no fear of holding his own.

Having considered all the chances, he turned the key so softly that there was not the least noise, and pushed the door open.

He then listened.

For a full minute he stood there, scarcely breathing, but not a sound could be heard.

The deserted flat was in total darkness, and there was something awe-inspiring, if not intimidating in entering it.

But there was no backing out now, and he stepped quietly in and closed the door.

Again he listened, but all was as quiet as the grave.

He flashed his lamp along the hall and found it empty, so he entered the front room.

A thorough search of that apartment resulted the same.

Thad began to feel reassured now, and to conclude that he had been mistaken. But scarcely had the thought flashed through his brain when he heard heavy footsteps in the rear of the flat, presumably the kitchen or dining-room. Quicker than lightning he shut off his light and stepped noiselessly into the private hall.

Here he listened again, but could hear nothing, so he tiptoed to the rear end of the hall.

Here another difficulty presented itself. The door was shut, and to open it would be to call attention to his presence and therefore put the enemy on his guard.

Still he could not hesitate now. He was in for it and must go through, so he used similar tactics to what he had when he opened the outside door. He turned the knob very softly, pushed the door wide open, and paused to listen.

Not a sound was to be heard.

Now came one of the most hazardous steps of the detective's life, for if the enemy was concealing himself the detective was completely at his mercy.

To step into that dark room, knowing in all reason that a lurking and probably deadly enemy was there, was like stepping into the jaws of death, and enough to check the bravest; and yet Thad Burr made the step.

Once inside he felt more secure, for some reason or other. It is the anticipation of danger more than the realization that shakes a brave man's determination.

After listening a moment, and hearing nothing, the detective suddenly flashed his lantern about the kitchen.

Not a soul was there.

A feeling akin to disappointment oppressed him at this discovery. He rather hoped "his man" would be there, so that he could have it out with him.

As it was, he would have to continue his search into the other rooms, and as long as the party continued to play hide-and-seek just so long would the detective be kept in suspense.

Before continuing his search, however, he took the precaution to light the gas in the kitchen, so that the fellow could not slip back into it. He then proceeded boldly into the dining-room, flooding the way with light as he went. But a thorough search of that room revealed not a soul.

He searched the little bedroom leading off from the dining-room, where he had secreted the girl, and into which the secret passage led, but found no one.

Before leaving this room he took care to securely lock the door leading into the secret passage.

He had now but two more rooms to search, and he was not long in accomplishing it, following his first example of lighting the gas before quitting the room, in each instance. At the end of half an hour he had again arrived in the front room or parlor, without discovering a living soul.

The detective did not know what to think of it.

Could it be, after all, that he was mistaken?

Suddenly he thought of the dumb-waiter through which he had entered the house the first time, and he lost no time in running back to examine it.

The slide was down, and there was no sign of anybody having been there lately.

This puzzled him more than ever; but after a moment's reflection he concluded that he must have been mistaken in imagining that he heard footsteps, and decided to dismiss the subject from his mind and proceed with his search for the strong box.

Returning to the front room, almost the first

object that met his eye was the cabinet, a beautiful piece of furniture of solid carved mahogany, inlaid with woods of lighter color.

An examination of the cabinet showed that it contained innumerable drawers, and each one was securely locked.

Thad looked at his bunch of keys, but was disappointed to find that none of them fitted the locks of the cabinet.

He was in a quandary.

He might have burst it open by sheer force, but he was loth to spoil so elegant a piece of furniture.

The detective tried to pick the locks, but to no purpose.

There was but one thing to be done. The woman evidently had the keys, and he would have to have her searched in the morning to procure them.

Having arrived at this conclusion, Thad was on the point of quitting the place, when his attention was attracted to a wardrobe in the next room, standing partly open, exhibiting a number of dresses hanging inside.

He had looked into the wardrobe while searching for his imaginary man, but it never occurred to him then to look for keys, and yet possibly the very keys that he wanted were in the pockets of one of those dresses.

He lost no time, therefore, in going to the wardrobe; and as fortune favored him, the first dress he took hold of he heard the jingle of keys, and it did not take long to secure them.

But even now his trouble was not at an end, for the keys were flat arrangements, very similar to each other, and yet no two would fit the same lock.

It was a long and tedious task, therefore, that he had before him.

One drawer after another was fitted with a key after many trials, opened and searched, without making any discovery worth mentioning.

Hour after hour dragged wearily along and the night was nearly gone, and still the detective sought what he could not find.

At last there was but one more drawer to examine, and still no strong box had been found, and Thad had about become discouraged.

He had gone through something like twenty drawers without finding it, and there was no more reason for believing it would be in this last one than in any of the others.

Still he persevered. Article after article was taken out, examined, and put back, and finally he closed the next to the last drawer and prepared to open the last one.

Notwithstanding his continued failure in the past, a kind of premonition or thrill of anticipation seemed to tell him that there was something to be hoped for in this last drawer.

He put the key in the lock and turned it, with a throbbing heart.

The next instant the drawer stood open before him, and at one end, but filling a third of its space, was a long, flat box, composed of iron.

The detective's heart nearly leaped out of his mouth at the sight.

"At last!" he exclaimed, aloud.

"At last!" repeated a voice which seemed an echo of his own, only it was too close.

The detective raised his eyes quickly, for the sound startled him, and there, within a yard of him, stood the captain!

CHAPTER XIV.

A NEW DISCOVERY.

THAD could scarcely believe his eyes.

For, aside from the apparent impossibility of any one getting into the flat without his knowledge, had not the watchmen at the station told him that the captain and his mother were safely secured in cells?

And yet here he was before him.

Neither man spoke for some minutes, but stood eying each other curiously.

The captain was the first to speak.

"Well, sir," he said, "what are you doing here, may I ask?"

"I should like to ask the same question of you," rejoined the detective.

"That is impertinent, for I belong here; you do not," returned the captain, caustically.

"Perhaps you *did* belong here, but not now. Your place is behind the bars," retorted the detective, just as sharply. "I imagined that you were there now."

"Then, my young dude," cried the captain, scornfully, "you have been misinformed; I am not in prison, as you see, nor have I been to-night, or any other time. Now, give an account of yourself: What are you doing in my house at this time of the night?"

The epithet "dude" reminded Thad that he was made up as a swell, a fact that he had entirely forgotten.

He had no fear of the man before him, for he was well armed, and his match in every

way, but still he neither cared to tell him who he was or give him an impertinent answer; and while he was considering what answer he should give him, the captain asked:

"Who and what are you, anyway?"

"A burglar," replied Thad, coolly.

"Oh! In that case I shall call a policeman and have you arrested," was the equally cool retort, as the captain started for the burglar alarm on the side of the wall.

Thad was about to stop him, but upon second thought he considered it was the best solution of the problem, as the police knew the reputation of the house by what had occurred the evening before, and he would have no difficulty in identifying himself to the police, and putting the other man in the toils.

The captain turned on the alarm, and then walked complacently back and faced the detective, with a bland smile on his face.

"Now, my young friend," he said, "the police will be here in five minutes, and you will be made a prisoner. If you wish to escape, however, I will allow you to do so; but you will have to be lively about it."

"No, I thank you," said Thad, with much politeness. "You are very kind to make the offer, but I prefer to remain here and take my chances. It's too warm to hurry."

"Chances? Nonsense!" cried the captain, excitedly. "The only chance you will have, if you wait till the police arrive, is to be locked up."

"Oh, well, I don't mind a little thing like that, don't you know?" said Thad, carelessly.

"You are crazy! Fly for your life!" cried the captain, growing more excited.

The detective laughed at him.

The captain was frantic, but before he had time to reply, a loud knocking at the door announced the arrival of the police.

The captain rushed to the door to admit them, and the detective improved the opportunity to make a slight alteration in his disguise, or rather, remove the greater part of it.

When the police came in and Curtis pointed to the man he wanted them to arrest, he could not at first understand why they hesitated. But when he cast his eye again at the alleged burglar, he was surprised at the absence of the curly, golden hair, the mutton-chop whiskers, and the curled mustache, and instead, the plain, strong, but good-humored face of Thad Burr, the detective.

Curtis must have known him, for the color left his face instantly, and he became greatly agitated.

This all transpired in a moment.

The police no more than took a glance at Thad when they turned to Curtis for an explanation.

That gentleman did not appear able to give any, and began to back away.

"I'm afraid there's some mistake here," he said, in a trembling voice.

"No, there's no mistake," said Thad. "You've come to the right place, and there is your man."

The two policemen asked no questions, but sprung upon the captain and put the irons upon him.

"You should have taken the advice you gave me," laughed Thad, as the fellow went out of the door in the custody of the police.

An angry scowl was all the response the captain made, as he was hurried away.

As soon as they were gone, Thad lifted the box from the drawer, which, although heavy, he found he could carry under his arm without much difficulty, and prepared to quit the place.

The light of early morning was streaming in through the window, and Thad lost no time in making his preparations to go.

He had a great deal of work ahead of him, and although he had had no sleep for nearly thirty-six hours, he felt that there was no time for any.

As he made his way to the street, he pondered over the curious problem of this Captain Curtis being locked up and at the same time appearing in the flat.

There were only two explanations of it. Either he had made his escape from the police station between twelve o'clock midnight, the hour at which the detective had called there, and three o'clock, the hour at

which he appeared in the flat, or else there were two men so nearly alike that one might be mistaken for the other.

Thad was inclined to the latter theory, as he did not believe it possible for him to escape in so short a time.

To make sure of the matter, he jumped into a cab and drove directly to the police station.

The watchman had been changed, but the one on duty reported that nobody had escaped during the night.

"Will you allow me to look at the prisoners?" demanded the detective.

"Certainly," replied the guard, who recognized Thad.

The watchman led the way along a long corridor, and finally stopped in front of a cell containing two men.

They were both lying down, apparently asleep, but the guard made them get up and approach the bars.

Two villainous-looking wretches slouched up to the gate, neither of whom had the slightest resemblance to the captain.

"These are not the men at all," said the detective, in a disappointed voice. "Where are the others?"

"These are all there were brought in last night," replied the guard.

"Are you sure?"

"Look for yourself. There are but four others in the place, and they've been here for a week."

"Who brought these in?"

"Whalen and Tooley."

"Yes, they were the men I had with me. What time did they come in?"

"Between nine and ten."

"That is about the time they would have got in," said the detective, reflectively.

"What can it all mean, anyway?"

"I give it up," said the guard.

"By the way, where's the woman?"

"What woman?"

"Didn't they bring a woman in at the same time they brought these men?"

"No."

This was a poser.

It might be that they took them to the central station, as the men did not belong to the squad of this district, but Thad had given them instructions to bring the prisoners here, as he desired to have the preliminary examination as quickly and quietly as possible, and that could only be accomplished at a sub-station.

Then there were the hackman and bar-keeper. What had become of them?

There was something very mysterious about it, or else the Police Department was scarcely to be depended upon.

However, he did not care to bether his head over the matter at present, as he had more important matters on hand.

First of all he desired to examine the strong box and find out the nature of its contents, and to that end he started at once for his rooms.

"I wonder what Lily will think when she wakes up," he said to himself. "She will not know what to make of my absence. And then, poor girl, she can't get out, as every door is locked and bolted."

With these thoughts flitting through his brain, the detective made his way to his studio.

The forenoon had pretty well advanced by the time he reached the place, so he stopped into a restaurant and ordered breakfast for himself and the girl to be sent up to the rooms.

When he reached the studio he found Lily busily engaged in tidying up the place, and singing as merrily as a lark.

She was delighted to see Thad, and ran to meet him like a child of five instead of a girl of twelve.

"Oh, I'm so glad you've come," she said, her great blue eyes fairly sparkling with joy. "I was so afraid something had happened to you."

"Then you really think something of me, do you, child?" said Thad kindly, smoothing her hair with his great heavy hand.

"Oh, yes, sir," she cried joyously. "It seems to me that you are all the friend I have and that all the goodness in the world is in you."

"I am certainly your friend, Lily, and am glad to have you love me; but you are awfully mistaken when you think that I am

so awfully good. You mustn't think anybody very good until you find them out, my girl."

"Oh, but I know that you are good, sir. It seems to me that I can see clear inside of you and see your great big heart beating, and thumping and uneasy because it can't do more good."

"What a dear, silly child you are, Lily," cried the detective, kissing her white forehead. "Here is the strong box, my girl."

"Glory!" she cried, clasping her hands and opening her eyes very wide. "Where did you get it?"

"In the cabinet."

"Was nobody there?"

"No; not until I got possession of the box; and then, to my surprise, I saw the captain standing before me."

The girl laughed uproariously at this.

"You were surprised to see him, I s'pose weren't you?" laughed the girl.

"I certainly was, when not only were the doors of the flat all securely locked, but I believed the captain to be locked in a cell."

"If you knew him as well as I do, sir," said the girl, "you wouldn't be surprised. He has been arrested ever so many times, but they can never keep him. Once they arrested him and hadn't any more than got him down to the foot of the stairs when he came back, and then he changed his face so quick that when the police came up again they didn't know him. He looked like a real old man, and the police called him old gentleman."

"He is a slick scoundrel," remarked the detective, "but we'll get him yet, if he is not already in the toils. By the way, my girl, I ordered our breakfast to be sent up, and it ought to be here pretty soon. Is everything in readiness to receive it?"

"Yes, sir, the tables all cleaned off and the dishes are washed and I'm hungry."

"You must be, and so am I. It was a shame to leave you so long."

"Oh, that's nothing, sir," said she, laughing. "I've often been locked in the house for two and three days without anything to eat."

"What brutes those people must have been, to be sure. But here comes the breakfast, Lily. Take it off the dumb-waiter and spread it on the table. After breakfast we'll open the strong box and see what is in it."

"May I see, too?" cried the girl eagerly, as she transferred the dishes containing the breakfast from the hamper to the table.

"Certainly."

"Oh, I'm so glad. I've always had a curiosity to see what was in that box, but never expected to get to do it."

"You'll have a chance now, my girl, to your heart's content," said the detective, as he pulled his chair up to the table. "Sit down, Lily; don't be bashful. Friends, you know."

At the sound of the word "friend" her face brightened and she sat down at the table.

After helping her to whatever she would take, the detective fell into a mood of deep silence and reflection.

This continued for some time while the meal went on; but finally Thad was awakened from his reverie by the girl speaking, something new for her, unless she was addressed.

"Mister—what is your name, please, sir?" she said, timidly.

"Burr," replied Thad, absently.

"Mr. Burr, is that elevator that the breakfast came up on generally used for people to ride in?"

"Not often, my girl," replied Thad, somewhat surprised at the question. "Why do you ask?"

"Why, early this morning, before it was light, I heard an awful noise there, like some one pounding on the door. I thought you were asleep on the lounge and didn't want to wake you, so I went to the elevator and opened the door."

"And did you find out the cause of the noise, my girl?" asked the detective, laughing.

"Yes, sir; there was a man there. I think I know him by his voice, although he was disguised so that I didn't know his face. I think he's the same man that used to come to our house."

"Do you know his name?"

"Only Harry."

"Heavens! It cannot be! And yet it is in a direct line with my theory."

"Sir?"

"I was thinking aloud, Lily. Did you never hear them call him by any other name?"

"Let me see," said the girl, reflectively.

"Yes, sir, I've heard them call him Roxy."

The detective laughed, as that was a mere nickname, probably given to this man by his rough companions. But upon thinking the matter over he concluded to make a mental note of the name, as it might prove a clue to something in the end.

"Well, Lily, what did the fellow want?" he asked, after a pause.

"First he said he was going to take me away; and then he asked all at once if the detective was in. I didn't know what he meant, but thought that he might mean you, so I said 'Yes.'"

"What did he do then?"

"He kind of looked as if he didn't know whether to come in or run away, but he finally said that he wasn't afraid of any detective that ever lived, and that if I didn't come with him willingly, he would come out and tie me with ropes."

"Were you frightened?"

"No, sir, I wasn't a bit frightened, but I ran into the front room to tell you, and found that you were gone; but I found a pistol lying on the table, and I took it and started toward the elevator. He was just climbing out, and I shot."

"Hal hal!" laughed Thad. "Did you hit him?"

"No, sir, but I frightened him, and he ran away."

"Brave girl. I wish we knew who he is."

"Now I come to think," said she, reflectively, "I've heard them call him some other name, but I can't think what it is."

"Would you know it if you heard it?"

"Maybe."

"Latour?"

"Yes, sir, that's it," she cried, clapping her hands. "Harry Latour."

"Heavens! Truer than I dreamed," mused the detective. "The clouds are clearing away at last."

CHAPTER XV.

FROM FATHER TO SON.

"LILY," said Thad, when they had finished their breakfast, "after what has happened, I do not believe it will be safe to leave you here. The villains have discovered not only that this is my headquarters, but that you are here. I will remain here, nevertheless, but will have to make some alterations before the place will be safe. In the mean time, I shall take you to my own house. You will be more comfortable there, anyway, and the children will make it pleasanter than you could be here."

"But, sir," protested the girl, a tear starting in her big blue eye, "will I ever see you?"

"Oh, yes; you will see me every day or two, my child; don't worry."

Thad had not spoken as gently as he intended, because as was common with him, his mind was far away from what he was saying.

The girl buried her face in her hands, and remained so for a long time. Thad did not know how long, for he was deeply absorbed in the morning paper, which contained an account of last night's arrests.

Finally he looked up, and seeing her in that position, said in a cheerful voice:

"What's the matter, Lily, my girl?"

At first she did not answer, but a great sob broke from her, and a big tear rolled down between her fingers.

"Cheer up, my girl," cried Thad. "Don't be downhearted; everything will come out all right in the end."

She rose, and running to his side, put her white arms around his neck, and whispered in his ear:

"Are we friends?"

There was something so touching in the action that the detective could not keep the tears down, struggle as he would.

And the heart of the great rugged man went out to the frail, friendless child that had thus learned to trust and love him as a father.

He took her delicate form in his strong

arms and pressed her to his bosom, and as he imprinted a kiss on the pale upturned face, he uttered in the fullness of his heart:

"Ay, my child, friends till death!"

The child crept up to his neck again, and flinging her arms about his neck, said:

"And I'll be your daughter, and I'll never leave you, even for my own mamma."

"We shall see," said Burr, wiping his eyes on the back of his hand. "But now, Lily, my child, we—"

"Don't call me Lily, my child," she interrupted. "Call me 'Lily Friend.'"

"All right, Lily Friend it is, then," he rejoined, laughing at the droll idea. "Well, Lily Friend, suppose we examine the strong box."

"Oh, yes, let's," she cried, enthusiastically, running away to fetch the box.

She soon returned with it and placing it on the table, said, gleefully:

"There it is, sir; open it quick."

The detective examined the bunch of keys with which he had opened the cabinet, and to his delight, found one a great deal smaller than the rest.

Putting this into the keyhole of the strong box he found that it opened it readily, and threw up the lid.

This brought forth a scream of delight from the girl, and the next instant she had snatched something from the box and held it up.

It was the fatal scarf-pin!

"Do you know anything about that pin, Lily?" asked the detective.

"Lily Friend," she corrected him.

"Yes, Lily Friend," he said, laughing.

"I know it belonged to the beautiful lady that you think is my mamma," she replied.

"How do you know it belonged to her, Lily Friend?"

"Because I heard her and the misses talking about it, and the beautiful lady said it had been a curse to the family, and she didn't want to keep it any longer. Then the misses said she would like to have it or anything else that was a curse to that family."

"What family did they mean?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Did they never mention the name?"

"Only once, and then the misses said that that name must never be mentioned in her presence again."

"And you didn't catch what the name was?"

"No, sir."

"Well, let us see what else there is in here," said Thad, taking out a bundle of papers.

"Oh, yes, that is the Double-X paper, I think," said the girl, rapturously.

"How do you know? Did you ever see it?"

"Yes, sir; once the misses left it out, and I picked it up, and was wondering what those big red X's meant, when she came in and snatched it out of my hand, gave me an awful slap on the side of the head, and said that if I ever touched that again, or told anybody that I had ever seen it, she would skin me alive. And now I've touched it again and told you I saw it; I wonder if she'll skin me."

"Not while I live, Lily Friend," replied the detective. "But let us see what there is in this Double-X affair."

With that the detective removed the wrapper, which was of heavy manila paper, such as they use for wrapping legal papers, and was marked on the outside with "XX," in large red characters.

It contained three papers, two of them written in the identical violet ink used in the letter to the inspector, and in the same handwriting, and the other, which was a letter, was written in black ink, in a small, symmetrical hand.

The first two papers were of considerable length, and referred to a transfer of some property; and as they appeared to contain nothing that would throw any light upon the case in hand, Thad tossed them back into the box and took up the letter.

It was dated some twelve years previous to the date at which the detective took it from the box, and was yellow with age.

It ran as follows:

"MY DEAR SON CHARLES:—

"Nobody can regret to hear of your 'slip,' as you call it, more than I, notwithstanding you are old enough to know better than to get into such scrapes. It is true, as you say, that I made a similar mis-

take in my youth, but I was much younger than yourself and had not the opportunities that you have been blessed with.

"As for the child, which you say is a year old, do not, under any consideration, put it away as you suggest. Put it into good hands until after your marriage, which will soon take place, and then, after explaining matters to your wife, take it with you and be a father to it.

"This was my course, and although it cost me and others dear to me a great deal of sorrow, the innocent fruit of my folly was never allowed to suffer or even know his disgrace.

"I say never knew his disgrace, and while this is true up to this moment, I deem it only proper that he should know it now, hoping that he will not curse the man who, in a moment of folly, wronged his mother, but who has since done everything in his power to condone that wrong.

"Know, then, dear Charles, that while you are my son, the woman whom you have always called mother is not your mother. Your mother is now an outcast on the face of the earth, and I hope that you may never see her.

"It was not entirely my fault, my son, that your mother took the course she did. True, I could not marry her, because my social position would have been sacrificed in so doing, besides I was already engaged to the woman whom I afterward married.

"When I refused to marry your mother, she went away, although I offered to provide for her handsomely, and I never saw her but once afterward.

"She left me yourself when she went away, and I believed, even hoped, that she was dead, but such was not the case. She returned years afterward, after there were four children born to me by my wife, and we had a stormy interview. Nothing would have come of that interview had not my wife, impelled by jealousy, listened to our conversation, and when she knew all, left never to return to me and the children.

"So, seeing the sorrow my folly has brought upon us all, I trust that you will take a different course.

"There is a quotation in Addison's Spectator which I have marked 'XX,' page 506, and which I hope you will look up, read and profit by the advice therein contained.

"Hoping that you will heed my advice and forgive the wrong done to you and your mother, I remain,

Your father,

"SYLVESTER LELAND."

On the blank space remaining at the bottom of the letter, was the word "NEVER" in violet ink, followed by the initials "C. L.," and under this in the same kind of ink, but a different hand, "So say I. F. J. M."

The detective pondered over his discovery for some time.

Here certainly was a plausible theory, if not a direct clue.

Was it not plausible that this Charles Leland might have murdered the man who had wronged his mother, even if that man was his father?

But why had he waited so long? Where was his mother, if living? And what connection was there between Charles Leland and Captain Curtis? Or was Curtis simply the hireling whom Leland had employed to do his dirty work? These were questions which presented themselves to the detective and demanded solution.

"When these questions are answered," he mused, "the great mystery will have been solved. But there are still two points that puzzle me: What connection has Harry Latour with this thing, for connection he must have, and why should these people desire to implicate Miles Sanford?"

Thad looked up and found Lily lying across the corner of the table, supporting her chin with her hand and her great blue eyes fixed upon his face, like a cat's when she is watching for a mouse:

"What's the matter, Lily Friend?" he asked, laughing at her seriousness.

"I was just wondering what you were thinking about," she replied. "Your face was just like the sky when I've watched it on a cloudy day. Sometimes it would be bright, and then it would cloud up a little and only little patches of light would break out here and there, and then a big black cloud would come and cover up all the light and it would be awful dark."

"Why, Lily Friend, you're a poet and a philosopher," cried Thad, leaning forward and taking the pale face between his two hands and kissing her forehead.

"Please don't, sir," she said a little pettishly.

"Don't what, Lily Friend?"

"Call me names. I never heard anything else but 'Specter' and 'fallow face' and the 'white kid,' when I lived with the missus, and I was so happy because you didn't call me names, only the name I love, Lily Friend."

"My dear, silly child," said Thad, stroking her hair, "you don't for a moment suppose that I would call you a bad name, do you?"

"No, sir, but—"

"Well, my child, so far from being any-

thing to take offense at, 'poet and philosopher' is a name that the greatest people are proud to have given them."

"Oh, I thought a poet was something awful, because there was a poor man, awfully ragged and dirty, and with long hair, came up to beg one day, and the captain said he must be a poet."

"Well, there is a common tradition that all poets are on the point of starvation, because their souls are too much absorbed with the ideal and beautiful to allow them to look after the practical; but this is too deep a subject for you, Lily Friend. I'll explain it when you are older; you can't understand it now."

"Oh, yes, sir, I understand it," she cried, clapping her hands. "While other men are digging in the ground for gold, the poet sits looking at the clouds, just as I have done, playing that the great yellow clouds were piles of gold."

"You've got it exactly, Lily Friend. But to get back where we started, I was thinking about this letter, which I believe concerns yourself to some extent."

"Does it?" she said, clapping her hands with gleeful anticipation. "Won't you please read it to me?"

"Yes, but you will probably not understand it now. Later, I will be able, I hope, to make it clear to you, as well as to all the world."

He then read the letter to her, and she listened attentively. At its conclusion she said:

"I know what you thought I wouldn't understand."

"What, Lily Friend?"

"Who the baby is. I'll bet a dollar it's me."

"That is what I imagined myself, Lily Friend, but there is a good deal of mystery to clear up before we can prove it. Lily," he continued, seriously, "did you ever hear the captain speak of his father?"

"Oh, yes, often. He used to come to see the missus, the captain's mother, and sometimes the captain would be there."

"Did the old gentleman and the captain ever have any words?"

"Of course, sir, whenever they talked."

The detective laughed heartily at this; nevertheless, he could not but see that the child was unconscious of having said anything out of the way.

"You must be Irish, Lily Friend," he laughed, "to be guilty of that unconscious wit. I mean, did they ever quarrel?"

"Oh, yes, sir," rejoined Lily.

"Did the captain ever threaten his father?"

"Yes, sir, he often threatened to knock him down, and sometimes to send him to the asylum."

"To the asylum? That's strange," mused the detective. "Still, the girl may have been mistaken. Did the captain ever threaten to kill his father, Lily Friend?" he asked.

"Yes, sir; once."

"When was that?"

"Not long ago."

"Good!" cried the detective, eagerly.

"Tell me all about it, Lily Friend."

"Well, there isn't much to tell, sir," she said, twisting her hair into hard ropes.

"The old gentleman came five times one day for money, each time the captain gave him some, and each time the old gentleman came back a little drunker than he was before, and the last time he had to hold on to two chairs to spit over his chin, so the captain got mad."

"Did he strike the old gentleman?"

"No, sir; he gave him a dollar and put him out, and told him that if he didn't succeed in killing himself with that, he would do the job for him."

"Pshaw!" cried the detective, in disgust, dropping his face into his hands.

Both were silent for a little while, and then Lily said:

"Are you sad, sir?"

"Yes," he replied, a little sharply.

"I'm very sorry, sir. Did I say anything—"

"Yes; you've ruined the most perfect theory I ever had," he said, jumping up and pacing the floor, nervously.

"I'm awfully sorry, sir," she whimpered, the tears starting to her eyes, "but, really, sir, I couldn't help it. The captain—"

"Of course you couldn't help it, Lily

Friend," cried Thad, melting at once and patting the girl's cheek, "and I was a brute for speaking as I did. But I was so put out to find that what I imagined to be the father of Charles Leland, was only some drunken old dotard, that I could not contain myself."

CHAPTER XVI.

FRIENDS AND ENEMIES.

"WELL, Lily Friend," said the detective, after they had finished reading the letter, "I have a great deal to do to-day, so we will go right over to my house where I will leave you while I go about my other business."

"Very well, sir," returned the girl with a sigh. "But I do wish it was night."

"Why, Lily Friend?" he asked in surprise.

"'Cause this dress don't look well in the street, and it's all I have."

The detective surveyed her garment, and was astonished. He was not only astonished at the garment, but astonished at himself that he hadn't noticed it before. The girl's dress, in fact, consisted simply of two flour sacks sewed together, puckered at the neck, and innocent of sleeves. This was absolutely all she had on except a pair of worn-out shoes unaccompanied by stockings.

She was scrupulously clean, and whether it was this, her natural charming manner or the abstraction of mind due to his situation, that caused him to entirely overlook the girl's attire, the detective could not tell, but he was nevertheless greatly astonished when his attention was called to it.

"Well, I must say, that is a rather remarkable costume, Lily Friend," he said, finally.

"Let me see if we can't scare up something else for you to wear."

He rose and commenced looking through his extensive wardrobe.

"Here's a cloak you can put on, that will cover you from head to foot," he said, taking an immense cloak out and holding it up, "but it will well nigh smother you before you get there."

"What's this?" asked the girl, who was also looking through the wardrobe, taking out a suit of boy's clothing.

"Oh, that's a boy's suit," replied Thad, carelessly.

"That's funny," said Lily, laughing. "You surely never wore a suit like that, sir?"

"No—at least not lately. The fact is, Lily, that suit has a history."

"Please tell me," she cried eagerly.

"Well, I suppose you will never rest until you hear it."

"I don't believe I could, sir," she said, innocently.

"Well, then, some years ago there was a young lady got into her head that she would like to be a detective, and came to me to teach her the art. I advised her to go back home and give up the notion; but she was determined, so I put her on some work with me."

"How did she do?"

"Oh, she got into all kinds of scrapes, and made me more trouble than a little."

"What finally became of her?"

"I don't know. She suddenly disappeared one day, and that was the last I ever saw of her. Went back home, maybe."

"Why did she get into trouble?"

"Simply because she had no talent, no knack for the business. That was one of her costumes."

The girl was silent for a time. Finally she said:

"Say, Mr. Burr?"

"Well, Lily Friend?"

"Do you know what I'd like?"

"A new dress, I reckon."

"No, sir."

"What then?"

"To be a detective."

"You, Lily Friend?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, if ever a girl could become a detective that girl would be you, Lily Friend," laughed the detective. "But—"

"Don't say no—mayn't I?"

"We'll see."

Thad was silent for a long time and went on with his search. Costume after costume was examined and rejected, and he had gone through nearly the whole collection, a hundred or two, including many female cos-

tumes, without finding anything that he thought suitable for the girl.

"I'm afraid the cloak is the best we can do, Lily Friend," he said at last, "warm as it is."

As he spoke he closed the wardrobe door and turned toward the girl.

He could scarcely credit his eyes for what he saw.

The girl was rigged out from head to foot in the boy's costume, including a rather rakish hat which she had stuck upon one side of her head in a very rowdyish fashion.

"How are you, partner?" she said in a boyish voice, swaggering up to the detective, and putting out her hand.

Thad roared with laughter.

"You'll do," he said. "That's an idea. Come right along as you are."

The girl was very small for her age anyway, and looked much smaller in male attire, so that nobody would have suspected that she was not a rather bright boy of ten.

Thad made a few alterations in his own make-up, so that he appeared to be a well-to-do business man of middle age, and they left the house.

As the morning was fine and the distance not very great they walked from the studio to Thad's house, and he found a pleasant and interesting companion in his *protégée*. He could not help wondering at the transformation that had taken place in this child in the short space of twenty-four hours. From a cringing, suspicious wretch that could be compared to nothing but a vagrant cat whose life had been spent in alternately stealing a scanty meal and dodging missiles, she had suddenly metamorphosed into a bright, happy and affectionate being, whom it would be impossible to avoid loving.

So well did Lily play her part, that when she reached the house, and Thad had made himself known, his wife asked:

"Where did you get the little boy, Thad?"

"That is a waif I picked up, Pink," replied the detective. "What do you think of him?"

"He is very bright and pretty—too pretty, in fact, for a boy. It's too bad he wasn't a girl. As we have two boys, Thad," she continued, growing sentimental, "and only one girl, I should be so glad to adopt him, if he had only been a girl."

"Well, my dear," said Thad, laughing, "what would you say if I should tell you that this is a girl?"

"What?" she exclaimed, opening her eyes very wide. And then after surveying the supposed youth a moment, she said:

"Nonsense, Thad."

"Nothing of the kind," he laughed. "This is my—or as it is now, *our*—Lily Friend."

"You don't tell me?"

"I do."

"What is she doing in that costume, for pity's sake?"

"Partly a freak of hers, and principally because the poor child had nothing else to wear."

Thad then related to his wife the whole story of his finding the girl and all their adventures down to the present moment, and explained that he had a clue to who her mother was and hoped to find her.

"Indeed, without wishing the child any harm," said Mrs. Burr at the conclusion of Thad's narrative, "I almost hope you won't find her mother."

"Why, my dear?" asked Thad.

"Because from what you have told me, together with the child's own presence, my heart has so warmed toward her that I feel that I shall never want to give her up."

"I am delighted to hear you say so, my dear," cried Thad, rapturously, putting his arm about his wife and kissing her. "She is a dear good girl, and I'm glad to see that you are warmed toward her as I was. See, Lily Friend," he continued, turning to the girl, "you have another friend till death."

The girl's eyes filled with tears, and running to the lady she flung her arms about her neck and began to sob.

"What's the matter, Lily Friend?" asked Thad, tenderly.

"Oh, sir, it's all too good," she sobbed. "I know it can't last. I'll wake up pretty soon and find it's all a dream, and hear the

missus calling me 'taller-face' and feel her cuff my ears and pinch me."

"No, no, my poor child—Lily Friend," said the detective, soothingly, "this is no dream; it is real, and you must forget the hateful past."

"Oh, I'll try it, sir. But it's very hard to believe that I have two friends now when I didn't have any yesterday."

"Never mind, my child," coaxed Mrs. Burr, "you will have dozens of friends, and good ones, too, before long. But, come, let us see if we cannot find something different for you to put on."

"By Jove!" cried Thad, "I'm in a pretty big hurry, but I really must wait and see what Lily Friend looks like dressed up."

"What is the use of your hurrying off now, my dear?" she demanded. "It will soon be lunch time, and you may as well lie down on the lounge there and rest till lunch is ready. You look worn out."

"At your suggestion, my dear, I believe I will," said Thad, throwing himself down upon the lounge. "I had forgotten that I had not slept for something like forty-eight hours."

Thad was soon asleep and did not wake until nearly two hours afterward when his wife called him for lunch.

His first thought on awakening was for Lily, although his own daughter had come in from her lessons, and was ready with a hug and a kiss when he woke, and his two sons came in directly afterward.

"Where is Lily Friend, mamma?" he asked.

"She will be down in a minute, my dear," replied his wife.

Scarcely were the words out of her mouth when Lily came tripping in, clad in a white muslin dress, black stockings and tan gaiters; while a pale blue ribbon confined her hair, and the tiniest sprig of violets was pinned on her bosom.

"What do you think of our girl now, Thad?" demanded his wife.

Thad was speechless for a moment with astonishment. When he finally found his tongue, it was to say:

"By Jove! This is a miracle! I wonder," he continued, after a pause, which was devoted to looking the child over from head to foot, "I wonder what those brutes would think of her now."

"Do you think they'd call me the 'Specter' now, sir?" said Lily, blushing probably for the first time in her life.

"They would hardly call you 'tallow-face' with that blush in your cheeks, Lily Friend," said Thad, taking her slender hands in his own; "and I think if your own mother should see you now, she would claim you against all the world."

"Then I hope, sir, that she will never see me," cried Lily, vehemently.

"Why, Lily Friend?" queried Thad.

"Because I know I shall never love her as I do you and Mrs. Burr."

"But if she demands you, we have no right to keep you, Lily Friend," said the detective; "besides, if your mother is the person I think she is, she can do much better by you than we can. I am only a poor man, Lily Friend, while she is rich, and can make a great lady of you."

"I would rather stay with you and be poor, if—"

Here she broke down, and running to Mrs. Burr, buried her face in her bosom and began to sob.

"No, no, my child, you shall not go," cried Mrs. Burr, tenderly, putting her arm around the child's neck. "You shall always stay with me and be my child."

"Oh, I'm so glad," cried Lily, smiling through her tears. "And may I—may I—call you—you—mamma?" she faltered.

"Certainly, my child," replied the lady, tenderly. "But, come; lunch is ready."

They all repaired to the dining-room for lunch, all except the detective's own daughter, Beatrice, a girl of nearly Lily's age, who complained of being ill, and remained behind.

Beatrice was a dark haired, black-eyed girl quiet, subtle and jealous.

The family, including the two boys, aged, respectively, ten and thirteen, had been too much engrossed with the new-comer to notice Beatrice during the scene above recorded, or they might have been surprised.

They would have seen a face, naturally dark, fairly black with malignancy.

When the family returned from the dining-room Beatrice was nowhere to be seen, and upon inquiry of one of the servants it was learned that she was feeling unwell and had retired to her room.

Upon learning this Lily's heart was touched at once, and she expressed her determination to go to her, and bounded off up-stairs.

She found Beatrice lying across the bed, her big black eyes staring straight up at the ceiling.

Lily tiptoed up to the bedside with a mischievous, girlish smile on her face, and said:

"Come, sister, get up, and let's go out into the sunshine."

The next instant the girl shrunk back in fear and horror from the malignant scowl that met her; and backing into a corner, stood pale and trembling with fright.

The dark girl turned upon her side so that she could see her better and glared at her until it seemed as if her black eyes would pierce the frightened girl.

Finally she arose slowly, and sitting on the side of the bed, almost hissed:

"So you've come here to take my place, have you, tallow-face?"

"Why—why—no—I—" stammered the poor frightened girl.

"I know you have," interrupted the other. "Now, I want to tell you something. If you've got a mother, you'd better find her and go to her quick. You can't stay here; do you hear? My papa used to make lots of me, but now that you've come, he don't notice me, 'cause I ain't purty like you. Do you know what I'll do?" she almost screeched, springing off the bed and rushing toward Lily; *I'll kill you!*"

CHAPTER XVII.

MORE REVELATIONS.

THAD took his leave of his wife soon after lunch, and made his way directly to the Gilsey House.

A few moments later he knocked at Miles Sanford's door, and was gratified on hearing the drawling voice of that eccentric gentleman say:

"Come in."

As usual the detective found him with his back to the door, his feet higher than his head, reading a novel and rendering the atmosphere blue with tobacco smoke.

He did not raise his eyes from his book when Thad entered, and as usual, mistook him for somebody else.

"Well, you didn't catch it," he drawled, "just as I told you."

"That depends upon what you have reference to, old man," rejoined Thad, laughing.

"Hullo!" drawled Sanford, looking up. "It's—no, I'll be cussed if it is. Yes—well, I'll be hanged! Sit down, Smith—that's the name here, isn't it?—and have a cigar. Cuss my buttons! I'm always mistaking some fellow for some other fellow. I took you for that stupid good ass of a fellow, Harry Latour. The cussed idiot left here ten minutes ago expecting to catch a train that should leave the Grand Central depot ten minutes later. He'll be back, sure, I'm afraid, and I'd a blame sight rather have your company than his. Well, how've you been?"

"Can't complain," replied Thad, lighting a cigar. "How's it with yourself?"

"Blessed if I know. Too hot to go consult a doctor, and I take no note of such matters myself, you know. I might get a complicated case of the everlasting never-get-well and croak, and if some stupid doctor didn't give me the tip I wouldn't hear of it till I read it in the papers. How's the—oh, by the way, how's that case coming on?" he asked, suddenly springing up with an energy entirely new to him.

"So, so. What have you done on your end of the scheme?"

"Not a cussed thing. You see its deuced hot, and I've been kind of waiting for—"

"The criminal to come round and confess?" said Thad, laughingly.

"That's about it. How long do you think I'll have to wait, Smith?"

"Oh, about a hundred years."

"All right, I'll wait; I'm a perfect fiend for sitting down. Well, I s'pose you've been turning the world topsy-turvy and sifting the

lower stratum for clues, eh Smith? A clue, a theory—ah! a drop of gore! a pocket-handkerchief scented with the identical sachet! 'Sdeath! I have thee in my clutch! Is that about the racket, Smith?"

"That's about it," laughed Thad. "So you have done nothing?"

"Scarcely anything. I've learned a few things that may be of interest to you."

"What are they?"

"Cussed if I don't forget now. Say, Smith, put me through your catechism, and we'll stumble onto whatever I know, but it won't be bulky enough to hurt you much. I was just thinking to-day that if I could find anybody that knows less than I do I'd take him in as partner. There's Latour, but he knows less than nothing and aren't sure of that. Go on with your catechism."

"Well, in the first place, have you found who wrote that letter?"

"No; but I'll tell you who I think wrote it," said Sanford with a yawn.

"Well?"

"Captain Curtis."

"Chestnut."

"What?"

"I knew that myself."

"The deuce you did."

"That's what I did. Now, I want you to tell me who Captain Curtis is."

"With pleasure," drawled Sanford, lighting a fresh cigar.

"Well?"

"Captain, or to strip him of a title to which he has no more right than you have to the name of Smith, Charles Curtis, is the son of his father, Curtis, senior, and he—"

"Nonsense!" interrupted the detective, testily. "He is nothing of the kind, and you know it, Sanford."

Sanford blew out a long puff of smoke and stretched his legs to the fullest extent.

"Good," he drawled at last. "If I know it and you know it, there's an end of it. But as I do not know it, I will take it as something of a favor if you will enlighten me."

"Sanford, let us have no more equivocation. Nobody enjoys a joke better than myself, and as a general thing I am charmed with your peculiar drollery, but—"

"Thank you, Smith," put in Sanford, interrupting him; "take another cigar; you're talking yourself dry. Go on—you like the charm of my charming style, *etcetera*, but—"

"But I want to get at the facts now, Mr. Sanford, if you please," replied the detective, cooling down a little. "Now, tell me, do you know Charles Leland?"

"Like a book."

"And you know Charles Curtis?"

"Very well. Borrowed a dollar of him many a time."

"Then you are probably aware that they are one and the same."

"As much as you and I are the same."

"Look here, Sanford," exclaimed the detective, almost losing his temper again, "do you mean to tell me that Charles Curtis and Charles Leland are not the same man?"

"I do."

"Are you positive?"

"Never was more positive of anything in my life."

"Did you ever see the two men together?"

"Let me see," he drawled, reflectively.

"I don't know that I ever did."

"I guess not. Sanford, I believe you to be too honest a fellow to deceive me, or I should consider you the greatest liar in New York; but you are mistaken. Charles Curtis is nobody but Charles Leland by another name."

Sanford rose up and stared at him.

"Are you sane, Smith?" he said, with unusual energy.

"Never more so in my life, I trust, Sanford," replied Thad.

"And you mean to tell me this, who know them both?"

"Certainly; he has hoodwinked you as well as the rest, and I'll prove it to you inside of a week."

"No, you won't, Smith. I'll find it out sooner. By Jove! Can it be true that I've been such an ass all this time? No doubt of it. Of course I'm an idiot. But say, if this is true, he's got a deuced good joke on me, or I on him, I don't know which."

"How is that?"

"Why, I wanted a hundred a couple of

weeks ago, and now that the old gent is no more I had to go somewhere else. I knew that Charley Leland would lend me fifty if he thought there was any show of getting it back; and I was pretty sure of the same thing from Captain Curtis. So what does I do but go to Leland and ask him if he thought Curtis would pay a fellow fifty dollars if he owed it, and he said he thought so; so I told him that Curtis owed me fifty, and as soon as he paid me I would return the fifty I was about to borrow from him. Charlie took the hint, smiled and gave me the fifty. Then what does I do but go to Curtis with the same kind of a racket about Leland and got the other fifty. Now, if they are one and the same man, I wonder what they, or he, or it, think or thinks of my veracity."

"Hard to tell," said Thad, laughing. "Now, tell me: did you never suspect that Leland was leading a double life?"

"Never; any more than I suspected him of being twins."

"You *are* innocent."

"Not innocent, but ignorant. There is a difference, my friend."

"Perhaps. By the way, did you discover what relation the veiled lady bore to the Francis Leland family?"

"No; but I discovered that she is Curtis's mother."

"Ancient history again."

"Uh?"

"I knew that."

"The dickens you did. What don't you know, Smith?"

"Very little. However, there is one thing I would like to know."

"Excuse me, Smith," said Sanford, suddenly, "while I think of it. You know I told you that this veiled lady had been levying contributions on me as regularly as the tide's ebb and flow?"

"Yes."

"Well, just think of it. I've been hitting her son tolerably regular for loans, and then giving it to his mother. That's one way of keeping money in the family. After this, I'll give her an order on her son. Now, go on; you wanted to know—"

"How long has Lillian Leland, *nee* Latour, been married?"

"Let me see. About five or six years."

"Did you know her before she was married?"

"Yes."

"How long before?"

"I don't know—three or four years, maybe. Why?"

"Did she ever get into trouble, to your knowledge?"

"What kind of trouble?"

"The usual kind, you know. Was she ever mixed up in any scandal in which the name of Charles Leland, or Charles Curtis, was associated?"

"Great rocks!" exclaimed Sanford, "what will you run up against next?"

"That is not answering my question," said Thad, sharply.

"No, certainly not," retorted Sanford, earnestly.

"Would you have been sure to have heard of it if anything of the kind had occurred?"

"Most assuredly."

"No, 2," said the detective, laughing.

"What do you mean?"

"That that is two of them on you."

"Do you mean to say that something of the kind did occur?"

"I don't say positively, but I believe it; and will prove it one way or the other inside of a week."

"Smith, you're a slick one," drawled Sanford. "When you get through with this case, I'll have you look up my family, and see who my direct progenitors are, and if you discover that I am the son of anybody in particular, I'll treat."

"Oh, as to that, Sanford, I may not have to wait till I finish this case; your genealogy may crop out during the present investigations."

Sanford sprung clear up this time. He was evidently agitated for once in his life.

"Look here, Smith," he exclaimed, excitedly, "what do you mean? You haven't run across anything of a crooked nature in my record, have you?"

"Not yet," replied Thad, laughing at his agitation; "but you can't tell what will turn

up before I get through. Sit down, Sanford, there is no need of getting excited just yet."

"All right," said Sanford, resuming his seat, but still a little nervous; "but you're such a beastly quiet wretch, Smith, that one never can tell what you are about to spring onto him."

"It's a way of mine, Sanford. But to get back to the original question, and leaving Lillian Leland out of the case, did you know that Charles Leland had got into trouble some ten or twelve years ago?"

"Yes, I've heard that."

"But you never heard the girl's name?"

"Yes. Let me see—Moore, I think the name was—Bertha Moore. She went on the stage afterward, I think, or did something of that sort. No, by Jove! I have it now: she became a detective, or tried to; but I don't know how well she succeeded, or, in fact, what ever became of her."

It was the detective's turn to become agitated now. He not only sprung to his feet, but sprung into the middle of the floor.

"You don't mean to tell me that Bertha Moore was the girl, Sanford?" he almost screeched.

"That's the party, I believe," replied Sanford, coolly. "Did you happen to know the lady, Smith?"

"Know her? Why, it was with me that she did all her exploiting as a detective. Great Caesar! now I *have* something to work on."

"Good," said Sanford, wearily, "but don't get excited, Smith. Sit down and light another cigar. What about this girl, anyway?"

"Why, in the first place, I know where the child is, and now that you say the girl calling herself Bertha Moore was the mother, I will have no trouble in finding her. Once she is found I will have the key to the whole mystery, surrounding the murder. Sanford, I want to ask a favor of you."

"How much?" queried he, fumbling in his pockets lazily.

"Oh, to blazes! I don't want any money, I was just thinking about offering you some."

"All right, lend me fifty," said Sanford.

"Well, what can I do for you?"

"Do you think a letter of introduction from you would have any weight with Lillian Leland?"

"I think so. You could get a plate of soup on it, anyway."

"Very well. Get your writing material and write, something like this: 'This is to introduce Madame La Chapelle, an honorable and worthy person, and one possessing remarkable powers of clairvoyance. Allow her to tell your fortune, by all means, as you will be pleased with the result and you can rely upon her confidence, and sign your name to it.'"

"What the Old Nick are you up to now, Smith?" exclaimed Sanford.

"Never mind, do as I request, and I'll have something to tell you before the week is over."

Sanford, without another word, wrote the letter of introduction, and handing it to the detective, said:

"Well?"

"That is all now," said Thad. "Only I want to ask you one more question."

"What is that?"

"Who was Charles Leland's mother?"

"What a question! Francis and Martha's mother, of course."

"Wrong again."

"What!"

"He was born before Sylvester Leland was married. It was his mother you were telling me about who came to the house and caused all the trouble."

"Great snakes! Say, Smith, tell me anything after this, and I'll believe you," he said sinking back in his chair wearily.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A PLOT DISCOVERED.

It was growing dark when the detective took his leave of Sanford and left the Gilsey House.

His first object was to go to the Central Station where the prisoners were supposed to be confined, first to find whether they were there or not, and second, to question Curtis, if he was there.

A twenty minutes' ride brought him to the station, but he was mystified as well as disgusted to find that, while the requisite number of prisoners had been brought in by the police under Thad's charge, at the exact hour and from the same place, none of them corresponded to his description, except the ruffian who had been taken in Mother Curtis's flat.

There was a tall man and a woman brought with him, but the man was not Captain Curtis, nor was the woman Mother Curtis.

The detective was dumfounded.

The two policemen who had gone up into the flat at Thad's order to arrest the parties were brought in and questioned.

Yes, there were the three people, two men and a woman, whom they had found handcuffed when they entered the flat. The two men were lying on the floor unconscious, and the woman was walking about the rooms with handcuffs on her wrists, in a state of great agitation.

No miracle could have given the detective greater surprise.

In fact, it seemed as if something like a miracle had been performed. How else could these two people, both handcuffed and one unconscious, have escaped, and substituted somebody for themselves.

The ruffian, whom Thad remembered had attacked him and he had knocked down and shackled, was questioned, but he remembered nothing after "de cove give him de clip in de lug, see?"

After thinking the matter over carefully, Thad remembered that when he went to handcuff the captain he found him shamming unconsciousness, and this was the conclusion he arrived at.

These people had confederates concealed about the place somewhere, and as soon as the detective was gone they had come out, released the prisoners and taken their places, knowing that they would not be identified at the trial, and therefore released.

So intent had he been upon this point that he overlooked another, but it occurred to him now.

Captain Curtis had been arrested before his (the detective's) very eyes the morning following the other arrests, while he was searching the cabinet for the papers. Therefore he was, in all likelihood, in the station-house of that precinct, awaiting identification.

Thad hurried away, and a half-hour later was at the precinct station.

A hasty glance over the slate revealed the name of Charles Curtis.

This was to be expected, as Thad had given the policeman the name of the prisoner, and the latter could not palm off any fictitious name.

"At last," thought the detective, "I have you, Mr. Curtis, and I shall soon see who and what you are."

On being shown to the cell, however, he was again plunged into the depths of despair.

The man brought forward as Charles Curtis was not he at all.

If the other case was a miracle, what should he say for this?

He had seen the man ironed and led forth by two policemen as plainly as he had ever seen anything in the world, and how could he have escaped?

There was but one explanation.

The police had been bribed!

All the policemen that were on duty that night, and had been sent in response to calls, were summoned.

Thad readily identified the two that had come up into the flat in response to Captain Curtis's call, and they were questioned.

Had they gone to No. — East Seventy-second street, between four and five, on the morning of September 6th?

To the detective's utter astonishment, they answered, no.

Here was a question of veracity. Thad had neglected to take their numbers, but he could swear to their faces.

The watchman on duty that morning could remember no call being sent in from that address or any other. In fact, it had been an extraordinary quiet night, and not a call had been sent in from anywhere.

About four o'clock it was reported by messenger that there was a row in a saloon on Second avenue, and Spitzler and Dolan had

been sent there. These were the men whom Thad had identified as being in the flat.

Yes, Spitzler and Dolan had returned half an hour later with the prisoner, who they said was Charles Curtis, turned him over and went away again. The watchman had taken the place of the sergeant, temporarily. He did not ask the two patrolmen anything about the row in the saloon, but was surprised when they returned, five minutes later, with two other prisoners.

Was the watchman sure that the first two patrolmen were the same as the last two?

Well, rather! He guessed he knew Spitzler and Dolan.

The two patrolmen themselves being interrogated, however, denied having brought in the prisoner called Curtis at all, or of ever having seen him before.

Here, then, was the solution of the mystery:

The first two alleged patrolmen were not patrolmen at all, but confederates of the wily Curtis, carefully made up to resemble two men whom they knew to be on duty at that station that night.

When the captain pretended to turn in a police alarm it was merely a signal to his confederates to come and get him out of trouble. The detective having removed his disguise they recognized him, and knowing his reputation as a sure shot and general hard man to handle, they concluded that the easiest way out of the difficulty was to pretend to arrest Curtis himself. When they got beyond the detective's vision they had substituted somebody else, and turned the substitute over to the sergeant. Their reason for giving the right name of Curtis to the clerk, was to throw the detective off the track and give Curtis time to make his escape.

While he was disgusted at the manner in which he had been tricked, the detective could not but admire the captain for the ingenuity he had displayed in carrying it out.

Having accumulated sufficient evidence now against Curtis to hold him, Thad went to a police justice and procured a warrant for his arrest.

Putting this into his pocket he returned to Broadway, and near Fourteenth street stopped in a restaurant to get something to eat.

While waiting to be served he started to peruse the afternoon paper, but had scarcely read a half column when an irresistible sense of weariness came over him and he fell asleep.

Thus he remained till the waiter awoke him to say that his dinner was on the table.

When the detective opened his eyes he was surprised to see a young lady and gentleman sitting at the table opposite him.

A glance was all that was necessary to tell him who they were. The gentleman was Laurence Leland and the lady was his cousin, Martha.

They did not recognize him in his disguise, of course, and after passing a few *sotto-voce* remarks touching the detective's inebriety, they began to converse freely upon matters in general.

Thad pretended to be absorbed in his meal and the newspaper, but he did not miss a word they said.

"So you saw Charles, did you?" said Martha, after a lull in the conversation.

"Yes, to-day," replied Laurence.

"What is he going to do?"

"Hard to tell. He claims that he will stand his ground; but my opinion is he will fly as soon as he can get away."

"How did you find out that he was the guilty party, Laurence?" asked the girl.

"I have not found it out for certain; but everything points to his guilt. There, at least, was a provocation."

"And you say they know where the girl is?"

"Yes; they learned to-day."

"How?"

"Another girl went to the house and told them. Said she could take them to the house. They declined to go then, as it was broad daylight, but they are to steal her out to-night."

"How?"

"Why, the informant is to have her out walking about nine o'clock, and they will

come upon the children, have a carriage ready and carry her off."

"Where is the girl?"

"At the house of a detective on West Thirty-fourth street somewhere."

"And who was this girl that notified them of her whereabouts?"

"The detective's daughter."

"She's learning young," laughed Martha.

"Yes; and if I were her father I think I should treat her to a dose of strap-oil that would last her the rest of her life."

"So should I," replied the girl vehemently. "I wonder how she came to do such a thing."

"Jealousy, they think, because the girl told them if they didn't take their girl away, she would kill her."

"You don't say! She must be a regular little vixen. Well, all I hope is, that they won't get the child, for I've heard it said they treated it most shamefully. In fact, I've understood that they were anxious to get rid of it."

"So they were; but just now they are anxious to get possession of her."

"Why?"

"She knows too much."

"I wonder if she knows who her mother is?"

"I presume not."

"Do you know, Laurence?"

"Yes, her name was Bertha Moore."

Thad's heart fell at this revelation. He was fairly sure that this was the case before, and he hoped to hear some other name that would throw some light upon who the girl really was. Laurence evidently did not know.

One thing was pretty well established, by what he had heard, however, and that was that his theory about Charles Leland and Curtis being the same person was correct.

"Do you know where she is, Laurence?" asked Martha.

"No, and I doubt whether anybody does. My opinion is that the poor girl is dead—committed suicide. You see she wanted the child, and its father and grandmother would not let her have it, and she was desperate. She attempted suicide two or three times, and failing in that, tried her hand at the next worst thing, that of becoming a detective. Then all of a sudden she disappeared, and everybody thinks she put herself out of the way."

"Poor girl," sighed Martha. "Do you know, Laurence, that I propose to try to look her up and restore her child to her?"

"How are you going about it?" demanded Laurence, laughing.

"Oh, I'll get a detective to help me."

"I'll tell you what I'd rather do."

"What's that?"

"I'd rather get a detective on the track of that brother of yours."

"He's no brother of mine, smarty!" snapped the girl.

"Pardon me, Martha; I did not mean to wound your feelings. But really, I have a notion to put that detective Burr upon his track."

"Isn't he already on his track?"

"Yes, but he doesn't know all that I do."

"You can't tell how much he does know."

"I'll tell you one thing he doesn't know and I do."

"What?"

The detective's ears were strained, and his heart beat fast in anticipation of this reply.

"He doesn't know that Captain Curtis, whom he tried to arrest, and failed, was no other than Charles Leland in disguise."

"Pshaw," thought Thad; "another chestnut; I sha'n't stay to hear any more of this fellow's silly prattle."

He went on with his meal, for he knew there was very little time to lose now, as a reference to his watch told him that it was after eight, and he must be at home by nine to save the girl from the hands of the villains.

The young couple were silent for a while, and finally Laurence said:

"Why are you so serious, Martha?"

"Say," she broke out, as with an inspiration, "do you know what I am going to do?"

"I haven't the slightest idea," he rejoined smiling.

"I'm going directly to that detective's house as soon as I finish my dinner and tell

him what they are going to do, and also persuade him to hunt up the child's mother."

"Pardon me, miss," said Thad, tossing her his card and rising from the table at the same time, "maybe I can save you the trouble. Nevertheless, I should be happy to have you call any time, and I am infinitely obliged to you for the information you and Mr. Leland here have imparted to me. I wish you a very good-evening."

With that he bowed and strode out.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE WRONG CHILD.

As soon as Thad got alone he began to reflect upon the strange conduct of his little daughter.

She had always been a little self-willed and selfish, owing, probably, to the fact of her being the only girl in the family, and therefore receiving an undue amount of petting; but he had never imagined that she could be guilty of such an act on account of jealousy.

Father like, he was not willing, after some reflection, to believe the story, and hoped from the bottom of his heart that the young man had been mistaken.

He had taken a horse-car, and was not long in arriving at Thirty-fourth street, where he alighted and started briskly toward home.

As he walked along an idea occurred to him.

He would not go directly to the house, but watch for the appearance of the children; and, as he did not want them to know him, he concluded to alter his disguise a little.

He had an extra wig and beard in his pocket, so he stopped into a barber-shop on Ninth avenue where he was acquainted, to make the change.

Substituting the blonde, curly wig for one of straight black hair, and the tawny side-whiskers for a full black beard, nobody would have suspected that he was the dapper dude who went into the barber-shop five minutes before. The natty derby hat was also left behind and replaced with a slouch hat.

In this make-up he sauntered up Thirty-fourth street toward Tenth avenue.

It was then a quarter to nine, and quite dark on the street, which, as usual, was deserted and quiet.

He had nearly reached Tenth avenue, near the corner of which he lived, when he spied the two girls.

Before he got near them he could hear that they were disputing about something, and he strode on in a slouching gait until he was within a few feet of them.

He could then hear that Beatrice was urging Lily to walk down the street, apparently for the dozenth time, and the latter was protesting against it.

"Come on," he heard Beatrice say, "let's walk down to Ninth just once more."

"No, no, Beatie," protested the other, "let us go in now. I'm so tired, and besides it is late and mamma will be anxious about us."

At that moment Thad caught a glimpse of his little daughter's face and he was horror-stricken at the malignant expression upon it.

However, the deceitful child managed to invent a smile a moment later, and continued to plead with Lily.

"Oh, come on," she coaxed. "She don't care how long we stay out. I never go in before ten, hardly, and she never says anything."

"But I'm so tired, Beatie," protested Lily. "Pooh! Who ever heard of anybody getting tired so quick?"

"Why, Beatie, we've been down to the corner at least a dozen times, and I'm not used to walking much."

"You're a weakly sort of a kid anyway," said Beatrice, contemptuously. "If I couldn't stand any more than you I'd go jump off the dock. Say, tallow-face, why don't you jump off the dock? Folks don't want you round nohow."

"Why, Beatie, how can you talk so to me? I never did anything to you, and wouldn't speak so to you. I only want to love you," pleaded Lily, in a broken voice.

Thad had stopped in the shadow of a tree-box and listened to the conversation.

"Love me?" cried the vixenish child, sav-

agely. "Who wants you to love me? I don't. I only want you to clear out. Say, Lil, you know what I told you to-day?"

The other made no reply, but shrunk in horror from her.

"You know," continued the other, "that I told you I would kill you if you staid here!"

"Yes—oh, yes," cried Lily in a trembling voice.

"Well, I won't do it on one condition."

"What's that, Beatie?" asked the other with an eagerness that showed how deadly afraid she was of the wicked child.

"That you walk down to the corner with me as often as I say."

"Oh, dear, yes, I'll go Beatie," whimpered the other child.

"I thought that would bring you to your senses," sneered Beatrice, as they walked away.

Thad sauntered on behind them.

The children walked on in silence for some time, and finally Beatrice stopped in front of Lily and said:

"Look here, Lil, do you ever expect to tell my papa or mamma what I said to you?"

"Oh, no, of course not, Beatie," cried the other.

"Because if you do, I'll cut your throat while you're asleep!"

"Oh goodness!" cried Lily, trembling.

"You think that's terrible, don't you?"

"Oh yes, it's awful, Beatie; I wouldn't say such a thing to you."

"I don't s'pose you'd do such a thing, either, would you?"

"No."

At that moment a carriage came around the corner from Ninth avenue, and Beatrice said:

"There's a carriage; let's jump on behind and steal a ride."

"No, no, Beatie," protested Lily. "We are too big for that."

"No we ain't, come on."

"I don't want to, Beatie."

"But you shall. Remember what I said!"

Just then the carriage stopped and two men alighted.

Thad had secreted himself in the shadow of a doorway.

The men approached the children, and one carried a cloak on his arm.

"They're coming toward us," cried Lily. "Let us run!"

"What are you afraid of, you silly thing?" cried Beatrice scornfully; "they won't hurt us."

"But I'm afraid—"

"Good-evening, young ladies," said one of the men at that moment.

"We're pretty well, sir," rejoined Beatrice, boldly.

"Come on, Beatie, don't talk to them," whispered Lily, who was behind her companion, and clinging to her dress.

"Don't be a fool!" snapped Beatrice.

"What's the matter young lady?" said the man. "Ye ain't afeared of us air ye?"

Come, you're a purty nice girl, I want to talk to you."

As he spoke he had gradually approached the girl, until he was within arm's-length of her, and at this point he reached out and attempted to grasp her arms.

She was a little too quick for him, however, and evading his grasp, ran back toward the buildings, and almost into Thad's arms.

The ruffian followed her.

"None o' that," he growled. "Come, now, I ain't a-goin' ter hurt ye, unless ye act ugly, in which case I may cut yer ears off."

By this time he had followed her to the stoop.

The child sprung into the recess of the doorway.

The ruffian sprung after her, but never reached her.

For the next instant he lay sprawling on the sidewalk, and Thad stood over him.

The detective had dealt him a sledge-hammer blow in the jugular that doubled him up like a jack-knife.

Lily instinctively recognized her deliverer, and running to him, threw her arms about him.

"Don't be afraid, Lily Friend," said Thad, gently: "it is I, your friend."

"Oh, I was sure it was you, sir," she

whispered, clinging to him; "I was sure it was you, and I am not afraid."

At that moment a stifled scream attracted the detective's attention, and looking toward the hack, he was horrified to see the other ruffian fold the cloak about Beatrice and thrust her into the back.

Forgetting for the moment all about the infamy of which the child had been guilty, he thrust Lily to one side and darted toward the hack.

Fleet as he was, however, the ruffian was too quick for him. Thrusting the child inside, the scoundrel sprung in after her, closed the door and the hack drove rapidly away, just as Thad reached the curb.

For once in his life the detective lost his presence of mind.

The thing was so sudden and unexpected, that he stood stunned and dazed, trying to collect his thoughts and realize where he was and what had happened. It could not have been more than a minute, although it seemed an age, when he was brought to his senses by a pair of soft, delicate hands clasping his own, and a gentle voice, scarcely above a whisper:

"Oh, sir, have they taken Beatie away?"

Thad looked down into the white upturn-face, and by the light of an adjacent street lamp he could see that it was full of real sorrow and apprehension and the great blue eyes were full of tears.

"Oh, sir, have they taken her away?" she repeated. "Do, do, Mr. Burr, save her and bring her back, for if they take her to the missus' they'll abuse her awful."

"You dear, noble child," Thad at last found words to say. "I will go after her and bring her back. But you must run home. Good-by."

"Good-by, sir. Good luck."

And she darted toward the house, while he made off in the opposite direction.

As soon as he reached the avenue he called a cab, and, believing they would go in the direction of East Thirty-second street, where Mother Curtis's flat was located, he drove directly there.

Arriving at the number, the detective alighted and concealing himself in the shadow of a doorway, awaited the arrival of the hack.

Why he imagined that the hack would come there at all, or that he could have beaten it in the cab with the start it had, Thad could not himself have explained; but the paternal instinct was stronger than that of the detective, and it was paternal love guiding him now rather than a detective's cool judgment.

He began to realize this after he had vainly waited for over an hour, and his better judgment had time to get the mastery.

Meanwhile his mind reverted to the events of the evening, and he could not help wondering at the remarkable difference in the characters of those two children.

One, who had been raised with all the comforts of kindly influences of home, was apparently so devoid of feeling as to be willing to sacrifice a human life rather than have it encroach upon her domain; the other, brought up amid crime and immured to cruelty and deprivation, was heart-broken at the possible loss of her worst enemy. He could not understand it.

Another thing that puzzled him was, why had they taken his child?

Was it a stupid blunder on the part of the ruffian hired to do the dirty work, or was this a scheme deliberately planned, believing that if they could get his child he would be willing to exchange the other one for her?

Finally he saw the futility of waiting there, and decided to take some other course.

At first, in his bewilderment, he could hit upon no plan of action, and was on the point of going to Police Headquarters and reporting the case; but upon mature reflection he considered that such a course would reflect unfavorably upon his reputation as a detective.

He cudged his brain for awhile, and all at once he thought of Lily. She might give him a hint as to the probable place of concealment to which the child would be taken.

The detective sprung into a hack and was driven directly home.

He found his wife nearly frantic over the loss of her child, and Lily appeared to be but

little less distressed, and when he entered the sitting-room he found them in each other's embrace, weeping.

"Come, Lily Friend," said Thad.

"Oh, have you found her, sir?" exclaimed the girl, springing up.

"No, Lily Friend, not yet," he replied, sitting down and taking the child on his knee; "and I want you to help me."

"Oh, sir may I?" cried the girl in an ecstasy of delight.

"Yes, I want you to tell me where you think they would be likely to take Beatrice."

"Is that all, sir?" she said in disappointed voice. "I thought you were going to let me go with you."

"I'm afraid that wouldn't do, Lily Friend," he said tenderly.

"Why not, sir?"

"They might regain possession of you, and—"

"Suppose they do? They would then let Beatrice come away."

"But we do not want to lose you, Lily," cried Thad, earnestly.

"I know you don't, sir; but it would be better, unless you can find my mamma."

"Why, what is the child talking about?" cried Mrs. Burr, astonished. "I thought she was happy and contented here."

"There is a good reason for the change in her mind; but I will tell you some other time."

Lily, however, saved him the trouble.

"I am contented and happy here, because you are both so kind to me; but I have no right to be here or to be happy, when it makes somebody else unhappy."

"What do you mean, child?" cried Mrs. Burr. "Who do you imagine is unhappy because you are here?"

"Spare her the explanation, my dear," said Thad. "I saw enough this evening to convince me that Beatrice is extremely jealous of Lily, and would do almost anything to get rid of her. Indeed, I have the word of a reliable person that this abduction was the result of a plan originated by Beatrice herself to have Lily carried off. They made a mistake somehow."

"This cannot be, Thad! Our own daughter?" cried the mother, passionately. "How can you believe such a thing, Thad?"

"I could not, my dear, if I had not seen it with my own eyes. Why, Beatrice threatened to kill Lily if she didn't do just as she said. But we will discuss this some other time. Where is Lily?"

"Why, I thought she was right here," said Mrs. Burr, looking about, and surprised at not seeing her.

"Here I am," cried Lily, stepping into the room the next instant, dressed in the boy's suit. "Now may I go with you, sir?"

"You don't intend to let them take you, do you, Lily Friend?" said Burr, in answer to her question.

"Not if I can help it, sir."

"Then come on."

CHAPTER XX.

IN PAPA CURTIS'S DEN.

WITHOUT any more questions or explanations, the detective took Lily by the hand and they left the house.

The hack which Thad had hired to bring him from the Curtis flat was still standing at the curb, and they entered it at once.

"Which way, Lily Friend?" queried Thad, after they had taken their seat inside.

"Let me see," said she reflectively.

"There's no use going to the flat, I reckon?"

"No, Lily Friend, I was there."

"Were you?"

"Yes."

"Did you go up-stairs, sir?"

"No, but I watched the place, and know that nobody could have gone up without my seeing them."

"Unless they went up before you got there, sir. You see, it was some time after the hack started before you did, sir, and mightn't it have got there before you?"

This was a severe reprimand to the detective, but just what he needed at the moment.

It was a rare circumstance for Thad Burr to lose his head, but he had certainly done so in this instance.

Of course there was an excuse for a man

losing his presence of mind when his own child's safety was involved, but he himself felt it no less keenly.

"You are right, Lily Friend," said he, in a humble voice. "Why didn't I think of that before? You are a better detective than I am, Lily Friend. We'll drive to the flat first."

The order was given to the driver and they whirled away.

A few minutes later the hack pulled up in front of the number, and Thad said:

"You stay here for a moment, Lily Friend, and I'll go up and reconnoiter."

With that he sprung out of the hack and, having a key, entered the hall of the tenement-house. A moment later he had reached the third floor and rung the bell.

There was no response, and after waiting a reasonable length of time, he put the key into the lock, opened the door and went in.

All was darkness and silence.

He listened attentively for some moments, but as there was not a sound to be heard, the detective became convinced that the place was deserted, and was about to withdraw, when it occurred to him that it might be a good idea to make a search of the place.

Instead of using his dark lantern this time, his first action was to light all the gas in the entire flat. The detective then began his search; but, although he did not leave a nook big enough to conceal a cat unsearched, he could find no sign of a living being.

The door leading from the bedroom into the secret passage was locked, and so there was no possibility that any one could be concealed there.

He concluded to abandon the search for the present, although he was not satisfied.

He was confident that there must be some place of concealment about that flat that he had not discovered. Thad was led to this belief, or rather convinced of this fact, by the sudden and mysterious appearance of Captain Curtis the night he found the strong box in the cabinet, and that after he had reconnoitered the place thoroughly.

But to find such a place, in case any existed, would require a great deal of patience and hours of time, and the detective did not feel that he had either to spare at that time.

He therefore turned out the lights and prepared to go.

Thad had turned out all the lights except the one in the front room, from which he was to make his exit.

He had just raised his hand to turn off the light in the front room, when a pistol ball whizzed past the detective's ear followed by a deafening crash somewhere in the darkness of the rear rooms.

Quicker than lightning Thad whipped off the remaining light, leaving the place in total darkness, and drawing his revolver fired two quick successive shots in the direction of the report.

He must have aimed, or rather guessed well, for the next instant he heard a groan of pain and the hasty shuffling of feet.

Hurrying to the rear room, Thad flashed his lantern about him, but was surprised and disgusted to find nobody there.

One thing was there, however, which proved unmistakably that his shot had not been wasted, and that was a pool of blood.

The sight of the blood filled the detective with anticipation.

Surely he would be able to trace the author of that shot to his hiding-place by the trail of blood.

Flashing his lantern upon the floor of the vicinity of the pool of blood, the detective searched diligently for other traces.

For some time he could see none, but after considerable reconnoitering a spot, scarcely larger than the head of a pin, was found some distance away.

This led him to look further in the same direction, and another spot was found; this was followed, a short distance further on, by another and another, and so on.

The trail was easily followed for half the length of the room, and then it stopped.

Thad hadn't noticed the direction it was taking until now, but when the trail ceased, he took a survey of the surroundings and found that the trail had led into an open closet. So intent had he been upon the trail itself that he had walked almost into the closet without noticing the fact.

A flash of his lantern showed that the

closet was empty with the exception of a few articles of clothing hanging upon hooks.

That the closet had some means of exit, therefore, the detective was almost certain.

He sounded the rear wall, but it appeared to be of solid brick, and he turned his attention to the floor.

This was of plain, unpainted oak boards, and a very little examination was necessary to show that there was no trap or opening of any kind in it.

Thad was puzzled.

There could be no doubt that the wounded man entered the closet, and he had had no time to make his escape from it by the same way he went in, and therefore there must be some other exit.

Still, search as he would, he could find none.

Glancing at his watch, he found it was nearly midnight, and he concluded to abandon the search, and rising to his feet, turned off the light of his lantern.

As he did so he stumbled, and threw up his hand to catch something to save himself from falling. His hand came in contact with one of the hooks, and to his surprise it turned back and upward, under his weight.

He quickly flashed his lantern again, and found an opening large enough to admit a man's body in the back of the closet.

Thad was not long in availing himself of this means of egress, and passed through the opening in the wall.

It led into a similar closet on the opposite side of the wall, the door of which was closed.

Pushing the door open cautiously, he found that it was all darkness outside, so he stepped out as noiselessly as possible.

A survey of the place by the light of his lantern proved it to be another flat similar to the one he had just left, but unfurnished.

The floors being bare, the detective had no trouble in following the trail of blood, and discovered, after following it for some distance, that it led to the hall door, and as this was unlocked, there could be little doubt that the fellow made his escape that way.

"This, then," mused Thad, as he made his way back into the other flat, "accounts for the mysterious and sudden appearance of the captain, and also for the footsteps which I heard and could not discover whence they came. There being no carpet in there it is natural that the walking should sound distinctly in the quiet hours of the night. But I must return to my girl, or she will either think I have deserted her, or desert me."

With that he locked up the place and returned to the hack.

He found Lily sitting there with her large eyes wide open, waiting patiently.

"Did you think I was never coming back, Lily Friend?" asked Thad.

"No, sir; I knew you would come as soon as you could," she replied. "Didn't you find any one in the flat, sir?"

"No, Lily Friend; but a fellow found me."

He then related the account of the incident recorded above. At the conclusion of the narrative, Thad said:

"And now, Lily Friend, as Beatrice is not there, what do you think we had better do next?"

"Go to Papa Curtis's," she replied, promptly.

"Where is that?"

"Avenue B, near Seventieth. I know the place; as I was kept there awhile before they took me to Mother Curtis's."

Thad gave the driver the direction and they were driven away.

"Who is this Papa Curtis, Lily Friend?" inquired the detective.

"I don't know, sir, except that the captain calls him papa, and I always supposed he was his papa."

"Is he the man you spoke of as having come to the captain five or six times one day for money, and the captain threatened to kill him?"

"Yes, sir, that's the one," cried Lily, laughing; "only the captain didn't threaten to kill him; he only gave him a dollar, and told him that if he didn't succeed in killing himself, that he (the captain) would do the job for him."

"I see. Well, what do you propose to do when we get to Papa Curtis's, Lily Friend?"

"I'll tell you. You went into the other

flat, sir; let me go into this one. I want you to get me a bottle of whisky, and if the girl—Beatrice, I mean, is up there, I'll get her."

"All right, Lily Friend, but you must be careful that you don't get caught."

"I won't get caught, sir," said Lily, confidently. "Say, sir, I have a dark wig here that I found in one of the pockets of this coat; I wish you would flash your light and put it on me; and if you have anything with you to darken my eyebrows, I wish you would."

"All right, Lily," said Thad, laughing at the business-like air with which she talked and acted. "I always carry everything of that kind with me."

The detective turned the slide of his lantern aside so that the light illuminated the girl's face, and, after adjusting the wig upon her head, pencilled her eyebrows and drew a dark shade across her upper lip that might have been mistaken for the earlier stages of a mustache.

"Now, I think you'll do," he said, laughing. "You look like a rather tony, but very tough east-sider."

"Good," said she. "Now—here we are at the place—you go get the bottle of whisky, and I'll wait here."

Thad was not long in securing the liquor, some of the worst he could find, and came back and gave it to the girl.

"Now give me a pistol," she said.

Thad gave her a pistol, more and more surprised at her coolness and tact. She put the bottle into one pocket and the pistol into another, and then said:

"You follow me up, sir, and remain outside the door, in case I should need help, and we'll soon have Beatrice, if she's there."

They ascended the stairs, four pairs of them, narrow and dirty, Lily in the lead and the detective bringing up the rear.

When they reached the door of the tenement Thad stood to one side and Lily knocked.

Everything was very quiet, and the girl was compelled to repeat the knock several times before anybody came to the door. Finally, however, an old bald-headed man, with a sodden face and bleared eyes, came to the door with a smoky lamp in his hand.

Before he had time to ask who was there Lily reeled up to him with her hat pulled over one eye, and grasping him by the hand, cried in a maudlin voice:

"How do, Pop Cursis; how's health?"

The old man drew back and surveyed the pretended drunken youth somewhat suspiciously.

"Who air you young man?" he growled.

"Tha's funny (hic), tha's funny—doan' know me—Jimmy Cutter," hiccupped Lily. "Have a drink, pop," she said, thrusting the bottle under his nose.

This was too much for the old toper, and with a greedy grin he grasped the bottle and took a long pull at it.

"Don't drink 't all, old chap—leave a feller a drop, won't you?" cried Lily, pushing past him into the room.

"Oh, I'll leave you some, he grunted, as soon as he could catch his breath. "So you're Bill Cutter's boy, air ye? Why, cuss my old eyes if I've seen ye since you was that high," indicating the height with his hand. "Well, ye're keepin' up the repytation of the family fer drinkin', be ye?"

"Bet yer boots, old top," said Lily, staggering about boozily. "Say, give us a pull o' that bottle."

"After me, young feller," grunted the old man with a guttural chuckle. "Beauty afore age, ye know."

Here he took another long pull at the bottle.

In the mean time Lily had started to stagger to the back room (there were but two wretched rooms); but the old man caught her by the arm and pulled her back.

"Musn't go back thar, young feller," he growled.

"Why not, old top?"

"'Cause I've got comp'ny."

"The dickens you have (hic); girl, I s'pose, you old scalawag—girl, I reckon (hic); lemme see 'er, won't ye?"

"No, no," growled the old man, "it's only a kid, an' a man."

"All right, I doan' want no kids nor no man; let's sit down an' talk."

"That's right," gurgled the old man, swallowing another draught of the poison. "Sit down 'nd be comfort'ble."

Lily sunk into a chair and pretended to fall asleep almost instantly, and in five minutes she was gratified to hear the old man snoring lustily.

She arose softly and going to the door called the detective in.

"You look after him," she whispered, "and I'll go get the girl."

Lest he might come to and make trouble Thad snapped a pair of handcuffs upon the old man's wrists. In the mean time Lily tiptoed into the back room.

By the dim light from the front room she could see two beds. A child was asleep on one, while a man, with his clothes on, lay across the other, breathing heavily. Approaching the child's bedside she shook the sleeper gently.

The child awoke with a start, and screamed.

The next instant the man sprung from the bed and caught Lily by the throat.

CHAPTER XXI.

AN UNEXPECTED CATCH.

So tightly did the man clutch Lily's throat that she could not scream, if she had wanted to, but she struggled with all the strength she possessed.

The scream of the other child had been enough, however, to notify Thad that something was wrong, and the next instant he was on the spot.

Taking in the situation at a glance, the detective leveled a blow at the man's jugular with his fist and the man went down in a heap.

Without hesitating a moment the detective snapped a pair of handcuffs upon the fellow's wrists, and then turned his attention to Lily.

"Are you hurt, Lily Friend?" he asked, in a gentle voice.

"No, sir, not much," she replied, cheerfully. "He choked me a little; but that's nothing. Let me see about Beatrice."

Thad turned his light upon the bed where the child lay, and there, sure enough, was Beatrice, in a half-sitting posture and frightened nearly out of her wits.

She was clad in a garment similar to the one that Lily had been discovered in, and from the black and blue marks on her bare arms she had been receiving pretty rough treatment.

Beatrice evidently recognized neither her father or Lily, for she stared at them in a bewildered manner.

"Come, my child," said her father, "we have come to take you home."

"Who—who are you?" she asked, with a scared face.

"Your papa, Beatrice," he replied in his gentlest voice, approaching her.

She drew back at his approach.

"Don't you know us, Beatrice, sister?" cried Lily, taking off her wig.

"Oh, is that you, Lily?" said Beatrice, the color leaving her face, and dropping her eyes.

"Yes, yes, Beatrice, sister," cried Lily, cheerily. "Come on quick. We have come to take you away from this awful place."

The girl silently climbed off the bed, and as silently signified her readiness to go.

"Poor girl!" cried Lily, catching one of the bruised arms and kissing it; "they have been beating my poor, dear sister, haven't they?"

An affirmative nod was the girl's only answer.

The detective, notwithstanding he was glad to have been able to rescue her, could not forget the fact that her own criminal act had got her into this trouble, and was consequently not as demonstrative in his affection for the child as he otherwise would have been.

And Beatrice, on her part, undoubtedly felt guilty, and was glad enough to be let alone. So that there was nothing very remarkable about the meeting of father and daughter, except for its coolness.

As soon as Thad had placed the two children in the hack, and given instructions for them to be driven home, he looked up a policeman, and with him returned to the tenement.

The man in the back room had recovered consciousness, and was sitting on the side of the bed in a moody frame of mind.

The old man still reposed peacefully, and Thad and the policeman had some difficulty in getting him down-stairs. They finally succeeded, however, and placing him in a hack, returned for the other man.

He was able to walk, but did so with a bad grace.

The two prisoners were then driven to the nearest station and locked up.

"There are two of them that I can swear to," mused Thad; "even if they did beat me on the last deal."

Thad then sprung into the hack and was driven home.

He was surprised on arriving at home to find Lily sitting up waiting for him.

"Why, Lily Friend," he said, "why aren't you in bed?"

"I wanted to see you first," she replied.

"What about? My child?"

"I'll tell you. Beatrice is not well from the treatment she received from those people and has gone to bed. Now, Mr. Burr, I want to ask a favor of you."

"Ask it, my dear Lily Friend," he cried, warmly taking the girl in his arms, "and, after what you have done to-night, if it is within my power I will grant it."

"It isn't much, sir. You know Beatrice isn't happy with me here. She is not to blame; she can't help it, sir. It is natural that she shouldn't want some other girl to come between her and her papa. I wouldn't either, if I had a papa. I did not intend that you and Mrs. Burr should know anything about this until I found my own mamma, or got far away, as I thought of going in case we didn't find her; but you found it out to-night, sir. Now, my request is that neither you or Mrs. Burr will say anything about this matter to Beatrice. Don't scold her or ask her how she came to do it or anything, or even mention the circumstance to her at all. We will try to find my mamma, and if we do, I'll go to her, if she'll have me. If not, or if we don't find her, I'll go off somewhere else so that Beatrice won't see me and she can be happy."

Thad was so overwhelmed by the unselfish generosity of this offer that he was unable to speak for several minutes, but silently pressed the noble girl to his bosom.

"Lily Friend," he finally said, in a voice choked with emotion, "I promise, on your account, to say nothing to Beatrice, as that will probably be the greatest punishment she could receive; but do not, my child, talk of leaving me, even for your own mother, unless you want to break my heart."

"I shouldn't do that for the world, sir, after you have been so kind to me," said Lily in a husky voice; "but you must think of Beatrice. She is your own daughter, and will not be happy if I remain here."

"Then she must be unhappy, if she is so foolish," he cried passionately. "You will not go simply to satisfy a freak of hers. It may be wrong, Lily, but I love you better than I do her, although she is my own flesh and blood and you are not."

"Shame on you, sir!" cried Lily. "You should never have said that; and I must go now."

"Well, we will see to-morrow, Lily Friend. Go to bed now. Good-night."

"Good-night, sir."

As the detective stooped to kiss the child, she accidentally cast her glance toward the stairway leading up-stairs, and there, peering over the banisters, was a pair of black eyes, which Lily could not help but recognize as those of Beatrice.

At the sight of Lily looking at her Beatrice fled up-stairs.

Lily retired to her room and went to bed with a heavy heart, and it was almost daylight when she finally dropped into a troubled sleep.

Next morning she was cheerful and light, and no one would have suspected that anything had gone wrong; but Beatrice was shy and silent, never speaking except when first addressed, and scrupulously avoiding everybody's glance.

After the breakfast, which was very late, was over, Thad called Lily to him and said:

"Lily Friend, would you like to go with me to look for your mamma to-day?"

"Oh, yes, sir," she replied, rapturously.

"Very well, then, get ready. Mother," he said, addressing his wife, "I am going to the police station now, and when I come back I want to take Lily with me to see her mother. I wish you would dress her as tastefully as you can, so that she will appear to the best advantage."

"All right, Thad," returned his wife; "but it will seem like dressing the poor child for her funeral. I do not see how I can let her go."

"It will undoubtedly be hard, my dear," said Thad, "but it will be better, maybe, for her to be with her own mother."

"Yes, as much as I love you both, and Beatrice, too," said Lily, "I feel that it will be better for me to go."

Everybody avoided looking at Beatrice, and yet everybody was conscious that her face was scarlet, and that her eyes were bent on the floor.

The detective took his departure soon after, and Mrs. Burr proceeded to dress Lily in the most becoming dress she could find, adding such simple little ornaments as she thought would enhance her attractiveness.

When the child was all dressed, and while she was awaiting the return of the detective, she thought she would go and bid farewell to Beatrice, who was in her own room.

Lily, with the stormy scenes with Beatrice still fresh in her memory, entered that young lady's apartment somewhat timidly, and with a palpitating heart.

Beatrice was lying on a lounge, staring vacantly up at the ceiling, as was her habit when alone, and she did not appear to notice Lily's entrance until the latter spoke.

"Pardon me, Beatie," said Lily in a low, timid voice. "I hope I don't disturb you; but I have come to bid you good-by."

Lily expected a storm, and perhaps a fight, and had left the door open on purpose, so that she could retreat, if necessary, without hindrance.

Imagine her surprise and apprehension, then, when Beatrice arose, and without a word walked over and closed the door.

"Now I am in for it," she thought.

Beatrice walked back, and confronting Lily, surveyed her from head to foot, and finally said:

"Oh, how beautiful you are, Lily!"

"No more so than you are, Beatie," rejoined Lily, blushing. "It's simply a matter of taste—"

"Hush!" cried the other, sternly. "You know better. You are a thousand times prettier and better than I am, and you know it."

"Why, Beatie, I—"

"Not a word," interrupted Beatrice. "Why did you risk your life to save me last night, if you aren't good? Do you suppose I'd have done that for you?"

"I don't know, Beatie. I hope—"

"You know I wouldn't. I'm too hateful and wicked and mean. Oh, how I hate myself, Lily!"

"Pshaw! you shouldn't, Beatie. I love you."

"I know you do, because you're an angel; but I'm a devil, and can only hate. You were not satisfied with saving me from a fate that I got into by my own meanness, Lily, when I was trying to get you into trouble, but you must tell my papa not to say anything about it to me; that you would go away so that I might be happy."

"Well, wasn't that right?"

"Yes, but I couldn't have done it. Oh, Lily, I wish I was good, like you! I don't care about being as pretty, if I could only be as good."

"So you can, if you try, Beatie; for I'm not good. If you could be like your father, you would be very good."

"Yes, my papa is very good, and has always been so kind to me, but how he must hate me now. Oh, how I wish I was dead!" she cried, throwing herself down upon the lounge, burying her face and bursting into sobs.

Lily knelt down beside her, and putting her arm about Beatrice's neck, whispered:

"Don't cry, dear; you are not half so bad as you imagine. Come, cheer up! I'm going away and you will never see me again, and then you will be happy."

Beatrice sobbed on for some time, and at last became silent.

After a long pause she turned her tear-

stained eyes upon Lily, and after surveying her for a moment, said:

"Do you really love me, Lily?"

"Yes, Beatie, with all my heart," replied Lily, passionately.

"You are real sure you don't hate me?"

"Of course I don't hate you, Beatie."

Beatrice was silent for a moment.

"Lily," she said, in a trembling voice, at last, "can you forgive me for my wickedness?"

"Yes, Beatie, with all my heart," replied Lily, tenderly.

"And will you let me love you?"

"Nothing could make me so happy, Beatie."

"And will you please stay here and be my sister, and teach me to be good like you?"

"Beatie," said Lily, taking her hand, "that I cannot promise. I think it will be better for all of us for me to go away. I have no business here, and you will be happier when I am gone. Besides, if I have a mamma, I shall probably be happier with her and she will be happier with me."

"But if you have no mamma, will you come back and be my sister?"

"Well, I don't know, Beatie—"

"Say, yes. I shall not be happy when you are away, for I have learned to love you very much, and it makes me feel better to hear you say that you love me."

"Well, we shall—"

"Say, yes," demanded Beatrice, clasping her about the neck.

"Yes."

"Oh, thank you, Lily. You are my sister now, and I love you."

While this was going on, Thad had made his way to the police station where he had had the prisoners confined.

The justice's court was in session, and a few minutes after his entrance their case was called from the docket.

The names given were Silas Curtis and John Wilson.

Thad did not notice the prisoners when they were first brought in, being engaged in conversation with some one about the murder case upon which he was at work.

Finally the judge called upon the detective to identify the prisoners, and give in his evidence in support of the charge upon which they had been arrested.

He readily identified the old man, and stated that to the best of his knowledge the prisoner had given the right name.

His eyes then turned upon the other prisoner.

For a moment the detective's breath was almost taken away.

He could scarcely believe his eyes.

The prisoner was none other than Harry Latour!

The detective gave in his evidence against the prisoners, and left the court in an agitated state of mind.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE FORTUNE-TELLER.

As soon as the detective got back home he took Lily with him and repaired at once to his "studio." Here he made himself up as a well-to-do French woman of about forty years of age, rather dressy and somewhat nervous.

He had provided Lily with a large cloak with a hood to it, so that she could cover herself up from head to foot, and a heavy veil for her face.

When all was in readiness Thad called a close carriage, and they were driven to the residence of Francis Leland.

The detective had the letter of introduction given him by Miles Sanford, which he presented at the door.

After a wait of ten minutes in the hall they were ushered into the reception-room, where, after another wait, they were received by Lillian Leland, who came in with the letter in her hand and a supercilious smile on her face.

As usual, she was faultlessly dressed, and was almost dazzling in her beauty.

"Do you wish to see me, madam?" she said, haughtily, addressing the detective.

"Yes, madam, if you have ze time," replied Thad, with a pretty good French accent. "As you will see by ze letter, madam, I have ze grand—what you call—power to tell ze fortune. I can tell what ze madam have done since she was ze *petite*—what ye

call ze leetle babe, and what she will do in ze future."

"You must be a remarkable woman," rejoined Lillian, with a sneering laugh, sinking languidly upon an ottoman. "But some of us would rather not hear anything of the past."

"*Certainement, madame*," said Thad; "but how shall you know zat I can tell ze future unless I tell you ze past? If I tell ze past correctly, zen you shall have ze grand—what you call—confidence, in my power to tell ze future, *n'est pas?*"

"I suppose so," said Lillian dreamily, making herself comfortable on the lounge. "Who or what is this other creature you have here, draped like a nude statue in a Puritan community? One of your assistants from the land of darkness, I presume."

"Zat, madame," returned Thad, "eez my my leetle girl. She eez sensitive to ze cold, and ze light hurt her eyes so much I must put ze veil on like zat. No, madame, she eez no spirit."

"I'm glad of that," said Lillian, with a lazy laugh. "I detest spooks and hobgoblins; they make a person's flesh creep so."

"Well, shall I tell ze madame's fortune?" asked Thad, anxious to get to business.

"Yes, I presume I may as well be bored in that way as any other; I seem to have been created for nothing but being bored. You have your cards with you, I presume?"

"Yes, madame."

"Then sit here near me, so that if I should fall asleep you can nudge me and wake me up."

"Oh, I can assure ze madame zat she will not sleep," said Thad spiritedly, sitting down upon a low seat at her side and shuffling the cards.

"Then you *are* remarkable, for it requires more to keep me awake than it does to tell the past and future."

The detective shuffled the cards and allowed her to cut them, after the fashion of the regular fortune-teller, and then as he ran them through again his face darkened.

"Ze madame's life has been a sad one," said he; "ze black cards predominate."

"Slightly sad at times," drawled Lillian; "or would have been to anybody else. But I take fortune as it comes. It is too much exertion to worry or fret."

"Zat eez ze best way, madame. I see here zat at ze age of eighteen ze madame had ze grand trouble."

"Yes?" said Lillian, languidly; "what was the nature of the trouble?"

"Ze madame was beautiful, as she is now—pardon—but poor—which she is not now. She met ze son of a rich man, and fall in love. Oh how she love him! and he love her as ze bad man love ze beautiful woman. Well, like many young ladies, ze madame allowed her love to get ze best of her, and ze young man deceive her."

"Ze madame eez disgraced and in despair. She contemplate suicide, but thinks better of it. She try ze detective business, and fails, zen she go off to Europe. Ze father of ze man which have deceive ze madame give ze madame plenty of ze money, and she have a gay time in ze beautiful Paris. Zere she meet ze half-brother of ze man which have deceive her. Ze half-brother fall in love wif ze beautiful madame and zey are married."

There was undoubtedly a mixture of truth and fiction in this story, and Lillian's face was a study during its recital. At times the habitual cynical sneer was there, at others it would give place to a look of anger, and again to something approaching mortification.

Thad could tell pretty nearly when he was approaching the truth by the expression of her face.

It was evident, nevertheless, that she was struggling hard to control her feelings.

He had paused at this point, hoping that she would ask some question that would give him a clue to some part of her life that he was uncertain about, especially touching her child, if she had any; but she was silent and exhibited no curiosity in the matter, so he continued as best he could.

"Ze young man, which have deceive ze, madame, had also married, some five years before ze madame, about ze time—what eez zis? It cannot be: Ze cards say zat zere was a child!"

"What!" exclaimed Lillian, springing up in a state of great excitement, the color having entirely left her face. But an instant later she regained control of her feelings, and sank languidly back upon the sofa with a little laugh and the remark:

"You fortune-tellers invent such ridiculous things, they give one a positive start now and then. Go on."

"Of course, madame," said Thad, deprecatingly, "I know nosing myself, and must tell you what ze cards say."

"Very well, go on," she said dryly.

"Ze cards say zat ze child was one year old when ze tall man—"

"Eh?" she raised herself again.

"Ze man which have deceived ze madame, and six years old when ze madame was married. It was a little girl and very pretty; eet looked like its mamma, ze madame."

Here her face changed color, and Thad could see that she was undergoing a severe struggle with her feelings.

"When ze madame was married," he continued, "she wanted her child; but ze father of ze child's father objected to her having it. It was ze old shentleman's desire zat its father should bring it up; but its father's wife would not allow it to come in ze house, so ze poor child was put wiz ze tall man's mother."

"Ze madame still longed for her child, for she had none by her husband and was not very happily married anyway; but zey told her zat her child was dead."

Here Lillian's feelings got the best of her, and she covered her face and began to sob.

"I think I had better stop," said Thad. "Ze story, although eet eez probably not true, affects ze madame's feelings too much. She is rare sensitive."

"Yes, for God's sake stop your ridiculous story," she cried petulantly. "I am sorry that I allowed you to commence it."

"Yes, eet eez bettaire zat I shall stop, madame, although ze cards are brighter from zis on. Ze cards say zat— But I shall not tell you, I shall stop at once."

"What do the cards say?" she demanded, raising herself upon her elbow, while her face assumed a good deal of anxiety.

"Zat—zat—shall I tell ze madame?"

"Yes, yes, go on."

"Zat ze child did not die—"

"What!" she almost screamed.

"Zat eez what ze cards say, madame."

"But they may not tell the truth," she said, the ray of hope which Thad had noticed there fading away again.

"Yes, madame, in zis case I think zey tell ze truth. Ze child eez living, well, and very beautiful, and is anxious to find its mamma."

An entire change had suddenly come over the woman.

Her sneering hauteur had entirely vanished.

She rose to a sitting-posture, agitated and humble.

"Tell me, madam, if it is in your power," she cried in a broken voice, "where my child can be found! Tell me, if the powers that assist you in your dark art can conjure up this mystery, tell me where I can find my precious child, and everything that I have is yours!"

Thad had struck it at last. This cold, cynical woman, made so by the rude treatment of fortune, had at last melted under the pressure of a mother's instinct.

The detective could see that she was suffering untold torture, but he allowed her to suffer for awhile, while he coolly ran over his cards, as if looking for the desired information.

Finally he said:

"I believe, madame, zat I can find ze abiding-place of ze child, if—"

"If what?" she demanded eagerly. "If there is anything I can do, name it."

"Yes, madame, you can do much; but not in ze way of money. I want no money."

"You do not want money?"

"No, madame."

"What then?" she demanded eagerly.

"I want nosing. But ze child—"

"Well?"

"It want a mother's love. When ze cards and ze stars say zat your heart eez wiz your child, madame, zat you will be a mother to it, eet will come back zat quick," said Thad, snapping his fingers.

"Oh, madam," cried Lillian, piteously, "if the cards and the stars do not say that my whole heart is wrapped up in my child, that I long and yearn for it every hour, every minute of the day, and that I dream of it every night of my life; if they do not say that I will devote my life to my child, then they lie!"

They had both risen while she delivered this speech, and stood facing each other.

They had contrived so that Lillian stood with her back to where the child sat, and as she finished speaking, he gave a signal to Lily to throw aside the cloak and veil.

"Madame," said Thad, in a solemn voice, and taking Lillian's hand, "I am convinced that what you say is true, and I will now lead you to your child."

Lillian looked bewildered at his actions and words, but a moment later, when he had turned her round, and she saw the child, who as she stood there with a sweet smile on her face, was a paragon of beauty, Lillian almost fainted with astonishment.

She evidently could not credit the testimony of her own eyes, and thought it some trick, for she stood there motionless, gazing in a dazed sort of way at the child.

This must have lasted for a full minute, when Lily, unable to control her own feelings, or afraid that her mamma, after seeing her, did not approve of her, cried:

"Mamma! Won't you be my mamma?"

That was enough.

The next instant Lillian had the child in her arms.

For a long time neither mother nor child spoke, but silently wept for joy in each other's embrace.

Finally, however, Lillian unclasped the child's arms from about her neck, and pushing her away at arm's length, gazed at her with all the warmth and pride of a mother.

"Oh, how beautiful you are, Lily!" she exclaimed, in raptures.

"And oh, how beautiful you are, mamma!" cried Lily. "Just like the mamma I have dreamed of so often."

"They were not all dreams, my darling. Your young mind still retained something of my image, no doubt. And oh, how I have longed and prayed for you, Lily, while those brutes were abusing you, and now you have come back to me never to go away any more."

"Oh, won't that be splendid, mamma?" cried Lily, in ecstasy. "And, mamma, we owe it all to—"

"Yes, we owe it all to this good woman," interrupted the mother. "Madam," she continued, turning toward the detective, "I—"

But she did not finish the sentence.

When she turned to the alleged French woman, she did not see her, but in her stead a man.

While the mother and child were enjoying the raptures of their meeting after the long separation, Thad had improved the opportunity to remove his disguise, and when the lady turned to look at him, she saw Thaddeus Burr, the detective, in his own proper person.

She was so overwhelmed with surprise that she could not utter a word.

Lily was first to break the painful silence that ensued. She laughed outright.

"That's Mr. Burr, the detective, mamma," said she, "and he's the best friend I ever had. He saved me from those bad people that used to beat me, and he calls me Lily Friend."

"Yes, madame," said Thad; "as the child says, I am a detective, working on the murder mystery which hangs over the Leland family. I hope you will forgive this little trick, inasmuch as it was the means of restoring your daughter to you."

"With all my heart, sir," cried Lillian, passionately, grasping his hand. "But how came you to adopt this method of restoring my precious child to me, sir?"

"Well, madame, there were several reasons for it. In the first place, it was only a theory on my part that the child was yours. I had a hint here and a hint there, and putting them together, I patched up a theory. Of course I did not know whether, even if the child was yours, that you would receive it. This was my principal reason for the disguise I adopted."

"Mr. Burr," she said, looking at him with

a twinkle in her eye, "do you remember Bertha Moore?"

"I should say I do," he exclaimed.

"Have you seen her lately?" she asked, laughing.

"About a second ago, I think," he returned, also laughing.

"That was the girl detective, wasn't it, sir?" asked Lily.

"Yes, Lily Friend," replied Thad.

"And your mamma, Lily," said her mother.

"You don't say so!" exclaimed Lily. "Then you were no larger at eighteen than I am at twelve."

"How do you know, child?"

"Because I've had on your boy's suit twice, and it was a very little too large for me."

"What were you doing with it on, Lily?" asked her mother.

The detective, in explanation, related the account of the finding of Lily, and the whole story down to their coming to find her mamma that very day. And in conclusion, he said:

"Now, Mrs. Leland, I think I have done enough for you, aside from past friendship, to be entitled to your confidence."

"You certainly have, Mr. Burr," was the answer.

"Well, then, tell me, if you know anything about Charles Leland, *alias* Charles Curtis's connection with the murder of his father."

"I—I—know nothing, sir," she stammered, changing color; "that is—"

Here she must have heard some one coming, although Thad did not, for she ran to the window, looked out, and came hurriedly and nervously back.

"Conceal yourself, sir," she whispered, excitedly. "Here, behind this curtain—quick—you will hear all—everything, if you listen."

And before Thad had time to think she had hustled him behind a heavy curtain.

The next instant the door opened and in strode Mother Curtis!

CHAPTER XXIII.

AN UNEXPECTED CONFESSION.

"Howdy do, Lily?" said the old woman, as soon as she got into the room. "I'm glad I found you alone, because— Who's this?" she exclaimed, suddenly, happening to see little Lily. "What! as I live it's the Specter! What is she doing here?"

"That is my daughter, Mother Curtis," retorted Lillian, indignantly, "and I want no impertinent or disrespectful remarks to her or about her from you. She has borne that long enough!"

"But, Lily, that is *not* your child. Your child is dead. Somebody has imposed upon you. I saw your child die myself, and I can get you the certificate of its death."

"Which would be about as reliable as the rest of your and your son's transactions. If I wanted for other evidence that this is my own Lily her resemblance to myself and my mother's instinct would be sufficient. Talking about impostors, you and that rascally son of yours are artists in that line. Did you imagine that you could impose upon me forever?"

"Them's hard words, Lily," muttered the old woman.

"Not half as hard as you deserve, you old fiend!" cried Lillian, her eyes fairly snapping fire, as she spoke. "How else, if you were not a fiend, could you have abused my poor, innocent, helpless babe as you did?"

"I abuse your babe, Lily? How can you speak so to me? I was always a mother to her, and gave her all my means would allow, for I'm very poor, you know, Lily."

"Then you admit that you had my child? Just now you said that it was dead."

"So it was—but—you see—" stammered the old woman, seeing that she was caught.

"Oh, you may as well confess; you cannot deceive me any longer. I know all about you now; have the whole history of you and your son, and know what he has been guilty of."

"Oh, Lily," cried the old woman, breaking down, "do not you accuse him. It would break his heart."

"I only wish I could do such a thing. He has broken mine; but that makes no difference. I am only a woman."

"Oh, Lily, but he has changed since those old days—he has indeed. He is very repentant."

"Since he committed his latest crime, I suppose."

"Oh, Lily," cried the old woman, bursting into tears. "You shouldn't speak so of one that is in trouble as Charles is."

"What?"

"Yes, they have got him locked up."

"You don't say. How did it happen?"

"Why you see the detective had the girl and Charlie sent two of his men to get her, but somehow they made a mistake and got the detective's child instead of the one he wanted. Well, Charlie was pretty mad, but after thinking the matter over he concluded to keep the detective's kid and probably its father would be willing to exchange the other one for it."

"He knew it wouldn't do to take it home, because his wife won't have any children round except her own, and it wouldn't do to take it to my flat, because the detective knows all about the place and has keys for all the doors, so he took it to Papa Curtis's."

"There he didn't suppose the detective would ever find it; but somehow he did—there was a boy with him, that probably showed him the way."

"That was yours truly, missus," interposed Lily.

"You?" she screeched, looking at the child.

"Yes, me."

"What was you a-doin' in boy's clothes, Spec—I mean Lily?"

"Oh, a little trick I was playing on the old man. He's so awfully smart, you know, but the Specter was too much for him."

The old woman made no reply, but she looked as though she would have enjoyed having the child off to herself for a little while.

"Well, as I was saying," she continued, after a pause, "the detective found out the place and got in and arrested the old man and Charlie and took the detective's kid."

Thad could not understand what the old woman meant by saying that he had arrested Curtis, for he knew that the only ones he had arrested were old man Curtis and Harry Latour, but he concluded that the old woman must be mistaken.

"Oh, I saw an account of that, but the paper said that Harry Latour had been arrested," said Lillian.

"So it did," continued the old woman; "and that was the disguise he had on when he was taken."

"How did he come to disguise as Harry Latour, anyway?"

"Because the detective didn't know anything against him in that character."

"But won't he get Harry Latour into trouble by doing such a thing?"

"Harry Latour? Bless your innocence, who is Harry Latour?" cried the old woman.

"I haven't the slightest idea," said Lillian, indifferently. "I've often heard him spoken of, and wondered whether he was any relation to me or not."

"Bless your innocent heart," cried the old woman, "didn't you know that Harry Latour was only one of Charlie's assumed characters, the same as Charles Curtis?"

"I did not," replied Lillian dryly. "I knew that your son was an unmitigated scoundrel, but he was worse even than I thought. I thought he had merely taken the name of Curtis out of contempt for his father after he found out that he was illegitimate, and out of compliment to you because you had married a Curtis after Charles was born. But I didn't imagine that he was masquerading in a half-dozen different characters."

"So he wasn't, only two," snapped the old woman.

"Well, what is the trouble with him now? He is arrested under the character of Harry Latour; can't he give them the slip as usual, without their discovering who he is?"

"He might have done so if it hadn't been for the old man. The old fool! I've been telling Charles for some time that he had better cut loose from the old idiot, or he would get him into trouble, and now he has done it, and Charlie will probably swing for it."

"Why, what has the old man done?" asked Lillian.

"Confessed."

"What?"

"Confessed to everything, and implicated Charles."

"In what?"

"Are you so stupid as all that?" snorted the old woman. "The murder, of course."

"What murder?" asked Lillian innocently.

"Great heavens! You will drive me crazy with your pretended ignorance. You know what murder I mean."

"I haven't the slightest idea," yawned Lillian. "He may have committed a dozen murders for aught I know."

"No, madam, he has only committed one," snarled the old woman.

"What one was that?"

"Sylvester Leland, the man that wronged his mother years ago, and whom Charles would have killed long ago if he had taken my advice. The pious old hypocrite!"

"So Charlie killed him finally, did he?" said Lillian, with a yawn. "Oh, dear. It seems to me that I did hear something about a murder being committed in my husband's family, but I'd clean forgotten which one it was, or whether one of the family had been killed, or killed somebody. It appears that it was both."

"Oh, Lily, how can you be so cool about a matter like this?"

"What's the use of getting excited?" retorted Lillian, composedly. "Well, go on and tell me all about it. Do you know, this sort of thing interests me very much. How did it all occur? What was the direct cause of it? and why did he put it off so long before he did it?"

"Well, in the first place, Charlie has always been on the point of killing his father ever since he found out that his father had wronged me; but he put it off from time to time for want of opportunity or excuse. Finally both were offered. It was like this: At the time he got into trouble with—"

"Myself," put in Lillian. "Speak out."

"Yes, at that time it looked as if he would have to leave the country—I didn't know for awhile but he would leave the world, poor fellow—he talked of suicide—"

"Poor fellow! what a pity he changed his mind," interrupted Lillian.

"And during that time," continued the old woman, without noticing the interruption, "he made a will bequeathing all his property to his daughter, Lillian—"

"That's me," said Lily.

"At the suggestion of his father, and put the will in his father's hands. In addition to this, at his father's suggestion, he had made another will, or deed, rather, of all the property he should inherit at his father's death, to Lillian when she should come of age, whether he (Charles) was alive or not."

"This deed and will could not be revoked without being canceled, and they were in the old man's hands. Charles had tried in every way to obtain possession of them, but the old man would not give them up, and finally Charles had got wrought up to a pitch of desperation. He was on the point of ruin, because he could dispose of none of his property, and something had to be done, and the only thing was to get hold of those papers."

He made a final demand of his father for them, and was refused. Then it was that he decided to carry out his long contemplated project of putting the old man out of the way, and taking the papers anyway.

"He considered several plans for carrying out the scheme, and finally consulted Papa Curtis. He is very cunning in such matters, and at once hit upon a plan. The old man had seen the scarf-pin you gave me in my possession a few days before and begged me for it till I gave it to him. The old man pulled the pin out of his bosom where he kept it, and, showing it to Charlie, said:

"'Swift, sure and silent, my boy.'

"Can you manipulate it, Pop," says Charlie."

"'Sure,' says Pop."

"All right, come on," said Charlie."

"And they went to Sylvester Leland's house. It was nearly midnight, but the old gentleman was still sitting up. Pop went in first and got to talking to Mr. Leland, and then Charles came in disguised as Harry Latour. In this character Charlie had bor-

rowed considerable money of Mr. Leland, and he pretended to want to borrow some more. The old man put him off good-naturedly and finally took down a book with a passage marked in it, which had been marked for Charles, and turning over to the place, called his attention to it."

"While he and Charles, or Harry Latour, as he supposed him to be, were examining the book, Pop stuck the pin into the old man's side, and he died without a struggle."

"What did they do with the pin?" inquired Lillian, languidly. "Leave it sticking there?"

"No; Charles took it and went to Miles Sanford's room. Sanford had undressed, and his cravat was lying on his dresser, and while his back was turned, Charlie drew out the pin already in the cravat and stuck the other one, still wet with blood, into it."

"What was his idea for doing this?" demanded Lillian.

"To throw the suspicion upon Miles."

"I understand that; but what was the motive? What had Charles against Miles?"

"Everything. In the first place, Mr. Leland treated Miles with more consideration than he did his own sons; and in the second place, this will, as I forgot to tell you, gave all of Charles's property to Miles, in case Lillian did not live to become of age. This was the only reason that Charles did not put the child out of the way; he did not want Miles to get the property."

"Did he get the will?" asked Lillian.

"Yes."

"Has he them yet?"

"No; the detective got into my flat and took them, together with a letter from Mr. Leland to Charles, all of which I had in my strong box."

"Good," said Lillian, quietly. "And now, Mother Curtis, what do you want me to do for you? What do you expect of me?"

"Help me get Charles out of trouble."

"How is that to be done?"

"Swear first that you know Pop Curtis to be insane, and that his word is to be taken for nothing; and second, that Harry Latour is your brother, and not Charles Leland."

"And you expect me to do this?" cried Lillian, rising and facing the old woman.

"Yes; consider a mother's feelings, Lillian," cried the old woman, passionately.

"I have had good reason to consider a mother's feelings, Mother Curtis; but you and your noble son did not. And you ask me to go before a court of justice and perjure myself to save that black-souled scoundrel and murderer? I, whom he wronged, and cast off like a worthless thing, because he was rich and powerful, and I was poor? I, whom he robbed of the only remaining source of comfort in this world—my child? I, whose name he has tried to blacken, even after I had become the wife of an honorable man? Never, a thousand times never, Mother Curtis! If the black-hearted villain had a million deaths to die, and by sacrificing my life's happiness, I could add another, I would gladly do it."

"And now, Mother Curtis, for fear that Papa's word might be doubted, and there should be some chance of this double-dyed villain to escape, I have provided a witness to all you have said—a witness who is already in possession of a good deal of evidence against you and your son."

How Thad stopped from behind the curtain.

"Mother Curtis, allow me to introduce to you Mr. Thaddeus Burr, the detective."

"Mother Curtis," said Thad, smiling, "I think we have met before."

CHAPTER XXIV.

FULLY IDENTIFIED.

THERE was a look of despair on the old woman's face when she saw the detective.

For, although she did not recognize him at the time, she was perfectly well aware now that he was the same man that she had had at least two encounters with, and, in the natural course of things, he "had it in for her."

At first she met him with a mute and pitiful appeal, which in her bloated features, were hard to distinguish from a maudlin grin or an indication to weep; but when he went to snap the handcuffs upon her, she suddenly changed her tactics.

"Oh, sir," she began, "why do you want to arrest a poor defenseless woman, that is guilty of nothing but too strong a mother's love for an unworthy son? Oh, sir, think of my gray hairs! Think how you'd like to see your own dear old mother put in irons and taken to prison!"

"I'm very sorry for you, Mother Curtis, but I must do my duty," said the detective; "and the matters you speak of do not concern me so much as they do yourself. You should have thought of these things before you advised your son to commit murder, and before you abducted, or assisted to abduct this poor defenseless little girl, and then treated her to a course of cruelty that would make a hyena turn away in disgust; and then to come here and try to persuade this lady that her child was dead, and that somebody was trying to impose upon her in bringing this one to her. If this were not enough to prove your depravity, you must try to persuade this lady to perjure herself for the sake of shielding your scoundrel of a son and cheating the gallows of its just due. Oh, no, Mother Curtis, it is rather late in the day to talk about pity. Gray hairs are no more honorable than black ones on the head of a criminal. You gave me the slip once, ma'am, and I do not think you will do it this time."

This reference to her former successful escape seemed to awaken cheerful recollections in the old hag, for she instantly forgot her sorrow and began to laugh.

It was the low vulgar chuckle of the slumgullion.

"Yes, I did give you the slip, te, he, he," she laughed, "and so did Charlie; and we'll do it again, don't you forget it. It'll take more brains than you and old Byrnes have both got to keep my Charlie in prison. Go ahead, put the cuffs on me and take me to jail; I won't stay there long. My Charlie will soon be out, and he ain't the man to let his mother stay in long."

Thad paid no heed to her garrulous talk, but put the handcuffs on her in silence.

When he was ready to go, he merely said:

"If you like, Mother Curtis, you may put on that pious-looking black cloak of yours and your veil, and people won't know but you are an ancient aunt or mother-in-law of mine whom I'm escorting to the stores to examine winter flannels."

In reply the old woman turned upon him with a look of withering scorn that would have well nigh taken the bark off a tree.

"So you think I want to shield you from the disgrace of arresting a defenseless woman, do you?" she screeched; "or is it to spare this fine lady's name that you wish me to do it? No, sir, I won't. I'll go just as I look, and let you and this woman have the full benefit of my disgrace—a pretty howdy-do that I, who am being dragged to prison in my old age, should seek to spare the feelings of this base strumpet that first got my poor innocent son into trouble."

"Another outbreak like that will compel me to put a gag into your mouth," old woman, said Thad, firmly. "Come on, an open patrol wagon will be about the thing for you."

With that he hustled the old woman out of the house.

Fortunately he met a patrolman before going far, and he accompanied Thad and his prisoner to a patrol-box, where the policeman sent in an alarm. A few moments later a patrol-wagon rattled up, and the old lady was turned over to the policemen in charge.

The detective then returned to the house to bid Lily good-by, and thank Lillian for the part she had played in the little drama just enacted.

"Do not thank me," said Lillian in reply to his speech of thanks. "It is I who should thank you. For years I have studied to get out of the power of these people, but they had me so completely at their mercy that I dare not act. When I saw the old woman coming I knew that my opportunity had arrived. Had I been alone she would have bullied me into complying with the request you heard her make. Your presence, sir, gave me the courage to act the part I did, and I knew, if encouraged, she would tell all she knew, and you would be a witness to it."

"Why have you not exposed them before?" asked Thad.

"Because, as I say, they had me in their power."

"How?"

"I will tell you. As you, in your *role* of fortune-teller said, after my trouble I attempted to do something to earn an honest living. You yourself know, Mr. Burr, how hard I tried to become a detective. Well, I failed, and what was worse, one of the newspapers got hold of the fact that Bertha Moore was none other than Lillian Latour."

"This brought the matter to the notice of Mr. Sylvester Leland, and he sent for me. Very little passed between us. He knew how I had been wronged by his son. He offered me a comfortable income if I would go abroad. The income was to cease the moment I married or returned to this country."

"Well, I accepted his offer and went abroad, and as the fates willed it, I met my present husband in Berlin, not Paris, as you said. We were both young, and soon learned to love each other. Finally he asked me to marry him; and I loved him too much to deceive him, so I made a clean breast of my past life. He, blinded by his passion, overlooked all, and we were married. Later we both rued our hasty step. As soon as we returned to this country we realized our mistake. I dare not visit my husband's family lest they should recognize me, and as an explanation for my not going, as well as to prevent them from coming here, my husband has been compelled to invent all sorts of lies, among which was that I was of noble blood and refused to associate with them. This false position has rendered us both unhappy."

"Then came Charles Leland and his mother with their continual threats of exposure if I did not comply with all their petty wishes. Latterly I have been rid of Charles, because about a year ago my husband came in and discovered him in the act of bullying me, and, without asking any explanation, put him into the street and forbade him the house for the future. The old woman has continued to come, however."

"Have you ever visited the old woman at her flat, Mrs. Leland?" asked Thad.

"Oh, yes, frequently. That was for the purpose of keeping her away from here. You see, as you heard her say, her son is continually in straits for money, and I have been compelled to furnish them a great deal; and rather than have the old woman come here, as soon as I could obtain the money, through some pretext to my husband, I took it to her. I have frequently had the charge of extravagance thrown at me by my husband, when God knows nobody could have been more economical than I have, and not one dollar of the money that he supposed I spent for foolish luxury was enjoyed by myself. So you see, sir, how, bullied and wheedled on the one side, and scolded and suspected on the other, I fell into that cold, cynical habit that you have noticed."

"And now, sir, allow me to thank you from the bottom of my heart for removing all this gloom from my life, and restoring this bit of sunshine," she said, taking Lily in her arms, "and if there is anything you ever wish of me, and it is within my power, you need only ask it."

"There is one request I shall make, Mrs. Leland, before I go."

"And that is—"

"That you allow me to explain your position to your husband, so as to remove all suspicion of you from his mind and restore the confidence between you."

"That will be unnecessary, as he knows it already," came a manly voice close behind them, and when they turned to look, Francis Leland, Lillian's husband, stood before them.

"Pardon me for eavesdropping, my dear, and you, Mr. Burr, I believe it is; but, accidentally having to return home, and hearing the sound of a strange voice in here, something impelled me to peep and to listen. I am not in the habit of doing such things, but I am glad I did it on this occasion, for I feel that I am well paid in making the discovery that I have cruelly and wrongfully suspected my wife for so long a time. And now, Lillian, my love, I humbly ask your pardon."

A moment later husband and wife were in

each other's arms, in which position they remained for some time, in silence.

Finally Francis released his wife and fixed his gaze upon Lily for a moment.

"And this is your baby, eh, Lillian?" he said, taking the child's hands.

"Yes, Frank," replied Lillian; "what do you think of her?"

"She is very beautiful," said he; "the picture of you."

"And just as good as she is beautiful," put in Thad.

"Then I shall be very proud and happy to be a father to her," cried Francis, earnestly; "and I trust, sir, that in future you will reckon me among your warmest friends," he continued, seizing the detective's hand.

"Nothing could render me prouder or happier, sir," said Thad, returning the grip.

"Then I have two papas," cried Lily.

"How is that, dear?" asked Francis.

"Why, two days ago Mr. Burr promised to be my papa, sir, and now you are."

"Ah, that was until you got a better papa, Lily Friend," returned Thad, laughing.

"I don't know about that, sir," said the child. "This papa may be as good, but nobody could be any better than you were to me."

"Thank you, Lily Friend," said Thad, his eyes filling with tears. "I would rather have the testimony of a child as to my right conduct than to receive a medal from the department. But I must bid you farewell; I have some important work to do yet before I am done with this business. I have the wills mentioned by the old woman, and will bring them to you to-morrow. Good-by."

"Good-by, and God bless you, sir," cried Francis, clasping his hand warmly.

"So say I," added Lillian.

"Me too," put in Lily, clasping the detective about the neck.

"God bless you, Lily Friend," cried Thad. "It is the rescuing such bright bits of sunshine as you from the dungeons of vice, that robs the detective's calling of half its drudgery. Farewell!"

And he was gone.

The detective's first move was to go to his studio and get the strong box containing the wills and the letter and return home.

He was surprised on his arrival at home to find Laurence Leland and Martha awaiting him.

"Allow us to thank you, sir, for the noble work you have accomplished in this painful business," were Laurence's first words after the formality of greeting was over.

"I am always well repaid for my labor in matters of this kind," returned Thad, "in the consciousness of having done my duty; but doubly paid when I am made to feel that those for whom I have striven appreciate my efforts."

"Then you may feel doubly paid, for we do appreciate your efforts, Mr. Burr," said Martha. "You have made us very happy," she added, blushing crimson.

"Yes," said Laurence, "you have made it possible for us to realize the wishes we have long entertained, that of becoming man and wife."

"Good!" cried Thad, laughing. "Accept my best wishes for your happiness. And now let us speak upon what must be to you a very painful subject. Have you been to the Tombs to see the prisoner, Mr. Leland?"

"Yes, and fully identified him as my half-cousin."

"His disguise did not deceive you, then?"

"No. As soon as old Curtis made his confession, the police tore off his disguise."

"Were you surprised to find who the murderer was?"

"Indeed I was."

"What do you say now, Mr. Leland, to your suspicions of Miles Sanford?"

"Nothing, except that I was deceived by appearances."

"That's it exactly, my friend. Many an innocent man has been hanged on appearances. Suppose I had taken appearances for it? I would have had you and Miles Sanford both locked up two weeks ago, and he at least would have found it difficult to prove himself innocent. Between you and me, Mr. Leland, I wouldn't give that," snapping his fingers, "for circumstantial evidence."

"I presume you are right," rejoined Laurence.

"There is another thing I want to speak to you about," continued Burr. "I heard you speaking the other evening about Bertha Moore. Do you know who she is, or was?"

"I have no idea—some adventuress. I presume," returned Laurence, indifferently. "You were never more mistaken in your life, sir. She is a noble, generous woman, far more sinned against than sinning, and is now, I am happy to say, in possession of her child."

"Who is she?"

"Francis Leland's wife!"

"What!"

"Even so. And this explains why she has never mingled with your family. If you wish to do your duty by a good, pure woman, who had the misfortune to fall in the way of a scoundrel, you will make Lillian Leland's acquaintance, and take her to your bosoms as one of you."

"So we will," said Martha, "if she is not too haughty—"

"Rest easy on that point. She wants a friend and a sister, Miss Leland."

"Then I will be that friend and sister."

After a little more conversation the young people took their leave, not, however, until they had invited Thad to the wedding, which was to take place before very long.

CHAPTER XXV.

CONCLUSION.

A HALF an hour later Thad Burr called upon Miles Sanford at the Gilsey House.

He found that gentleman in precisely the same attitude that he had left him after his last visit, namely: with his back to the door, feet cocked up, a book in his hand and a cigar in his mouth.

As usual he was expecting somebody else, and began conversation with the detective accordingly.

"Well, who wins?" he drawled, without raising his eyes from his book. "Be square, now, old fellow; I trusted to your honor, remember."

"I win this time," said Thad, laughing; "and I'll act as square as a die."

"Hullo Smith!" drawled Sanford, looking up wearily. "I mistook you for a cussed idiot of a friend of mine. We got into a dispute about the pronunciation of a-g-a-i-n; I said it was 'agane' and he swore it was 'agen'; finally we made a bet and he went to look it up."

"You've lost, then, old man," said Thad. "It is pronounced 'agen.' Spelling and pronunciation are a little out of my line, but I know that much."

"And that is more than I know, for as I told you, I'm the cussedest fool in New York."

"Except Harry Latour, eh?" laughed Thad.

Sanford looked at him for a moment with a queer expression of countenance, and finally said:

"Sit down, Smith, and light a cigar."

The detective did as requested, and when he was comfortable, said:

"Well, Sanford, what do you say about Charles Leland and Charles Curtis now?"

Sanford sprang up, wheeled himself around so he faced the detective.

"Say, don't that beat the bell-wether?" he drawled.

"A little singular, old man; but just what I told you."

"But who would have imagined that imbecile Harry Latour, was the same man, too?"

"I certainly did not," replied the detective. "I suspected that Charles Curtis and Charles Leland were the same; but I never dreamed that Harry Latour was another one of his characters. That fellow is a great actor. He would have made his fortune on the stage."

"And just to think that in the character of Harry Latour he went among his own relatives, and they never suspected that he was anything else than what he represented himself. He had long talks with his own father, and the old gentleman, who prided himself on his knowledge of human nature, never dreamed that he was talking to his

own son. The old man was extremely fond of him, and as I once told you, I think, treated him with more consideration than he did his own sons."

"A strange thing about it, too: he looked more like the old gentleman in this disguise than he did in his natural character," said Thad.

"Yes, that was the queerest thing about it. Oh, he was a slick one, and you deserve a medal, Smith, for cornering him."

"Yes, he's clever," said Thad, reflectively. "But the keenest of them find their match, some time. By the way, he came pretty nearly getting you into trouble, Sanford."

"He did, indeed, and I have to thank you with your cool head that he didn't. Just see how cleverly he managed it. As I told you, he, as Harry Latour, had access to my room at all times, day or night—he had a key, in fact. Well, he came in here the night before the murder and wanted to borrow fifty dollars. He knew I wouldn't have it, and that I would go to Mr. Leland for it. He chose an hour when he knew it was too late for me to call upon the old man that night, and said he must have the money by six the next morning."

"Of course, when he called upon me, he had already committed the deed, and had that cursed scarf-pin, full of blood, with him. I had gone to bed, and as he talked he stood there by the dresser toying with my cravat. I thought nothing of it; he had often done the like before, and generally made some remark about the pin I would have in the cravat. I forget whether he said anything about the pin this time or not, but certain it is, he exchanged the bloody one for the one that was in there."

"He then sat down at the desk there and wrote a letter. I paid no heed to that, as he often did the same, and, in fact, was asleep when he finished and left."

"That, of course, was the letter to the inspector, and as it was in my handwriting, and written with the ink I always use, he expected the detective would trace the thing to me, and, finding the bloody scarf-pin in my cravat, would take it for granted that I was the murderer."

"And therein lies his greatest mistake," rejoined Burr. "Of all this man's work, this, I must say, is the clumsiest. Any detective with an ounce of brains would know that no sane man would stick the pin with which he had committed a murder into his own cravat."

"Ah, but, Smith, perhaps the trick was not so clumsy as you think," said Sanford. "There are two ways of looking at this thing. That he intended to throw the suspicion on me there is not the shadow of a doubt; but perhaps, after all, he did not wish to get me into serious trouble; so he arranged it so that I would appear to be a stark lunatic, and not responsible for my actions."

"There may be some truth in that," returned Thad. "Let me see, I believe you told me that Lillian Latour had never been mixed up in a scandal with Charles Leland."

"So I did."

"But I have found that she was."

"Indeed," very coolly. "Say, Smith, I did not tell you about that affair when you asked me, because I didn't consider it any of your business. Now you have gone on and found out just enough about the matter to believe that that excellent lady was the victim of a cold-blooded scoundrel who ruined her and deserted her, and it behooves me to set her right."

"The facts are these: Charles Leland met Lillian Latour, then but seventeen, I think, and pretended to fall in love with her. Whether his affection was genuine or not I do not know. She certainly loved him. Finally he persuaded her to marry him privately, giving as an excuse that his family would object to the match on account of the difference in their social ranks. He commissioned me to procure a clergyman, which was to be a bogus one, but which, in fact, was a genuine article."

"He lived with her for nearly two years, and their baby was a year old, when he tired of her. Besides he was to be married to the woman who is now his wife. He knew that he was legally married to Lillian, but made her believe that the marriage was a sham."

The poor girl was broken hearted, and was on the point of suicide. Then he wrote to his father that he had got into trouble with a girl—never hinting that he was married to her, and the old gentleman sent her to Europe. Once she was out of the country he procured a divorce on the ground of desertion."

"And all this time she has believed herself a disgraced woman and that dear little child of hers was illegitimate?" cried Thad passionately.

"Yes."

"And you have calmly allowed her to endure all these years of torture, instead of telling her the truth? Sanford, I—"

"Hold on, Smith, keep your clothes on. The fact of it is, I knew nothing about the facts till to-day. I was in Europe myself when she was sent away and supposed that the separation and divorce were by mutual consent. This morning I received a letter from Charles Leland requesting an interview. He said it was all up with him, and desired me to inform Lillian of the facts, which he detailed to me and told me where I would find the marriage-certificate and decree of divorce."

"Where did he say they were?"

"In an iron box, which he said you had."

"Here it is," said Thad, producing the box.

"Open it and let us see the documents."

The two men opened the box and took out the package of papers, and there, sure enough, in addition to the letter from Mr. Leland and the two wills, were the certificate of marriage, canceled, and the decree of divorce.

"This is the most glorious discovery I have made yet," cried the detective. "And you are not half such a fool as you would make yourself out to be Sanford."

"A good deal greater," drawled Sanford. "For if I hadn't been an idiot I would have found this out long before now."

"Have you told Lillian yet?"

"No; I haven't the cheek to face her now, unless I have some one with me, and I was waiting to see you."

"All right; I am going up there now, to take these wills. I didn't intend to go until to-morrow; but as things have turned out I may as well go now. In fact, I am only too anxious to carry the glorious news to poor Lillian and that noble fellow, her husband. "Come on."

The two men left the hotel and made their way toward the Francis Leland mansion.

"I say, Sanford," said the detective, as they went along, "do you remember of telling me that Lillian's assertion that she had never been outside of the United States, was true?"

"Yes."

"Well, how does that accord with the more recent statement that she was sent to Europe?"

"The last statement is correct; the first one is a lie," drawled Sanford. "You see, Frank's folks didn't know whom he had married, and to avoid all possible chance of their discovering it, Frank gave it out and made his friends that were in the secret swear to it that he married Lillian in this country. I swore to it, too. That is why I say that I am the biggest fool in New York. I've always been the confidant of some person with a shady reputation, or had to keep mum about some friend's past, and all that sort of thing. I tell you, Smith, I've done so much lying for the purpose of whitewashing people's characters that it makes me feel guilty to tell the truth."

Twenty minutes later they were ushered into the Leland mansion.

When they went into the sitting-room, a pretty domestic scene met their gaze.

Francis and his wife were sitting side by side in pleasant conversation, a thing unusual to them for many years past, and little Lily sitting on a low stool at their feet.

"You look very happy here," remarked the detective.

"Yes, detective," replied Francis, "and we don't deceive our looks—we are happy. For the first time in the five years that we have been married, Lillian and I have just discovered that we can be interested in each other's society."

"And to think," put in Lillian, "that it was all my fault. How I bless dear Frank."

when I consider how patient he has been with me."

"Your fault, my darling? Nothing of the kind. All our unhappiness has been the result of my selfishness. If I had acted like a man and forgotten the mistake, which was no fault of yours, and spent my evenings with you instead of at a club, we should have been very happy. But we'll make up for lost time in the future. The only thing," he continued, in a confidential tone to Thad, "that casts the least shadow upon our life now, is the thought that that sweet child there is illegitimate."

"Then, my dear friend," said Thad, drawing the documents from his pocket, "allow me to throw a ray of sunshine that will dispel that shadow forever."

"What do you mean?" gasped Francis and Lillian in a breath.

"Just what those documents will prove when you have taken time to peruse them, that Mrs. Leland was the lawful wife of Charles Leland when Lily was born, and that she was sent abroad to give her husband an excuse for divorce."

"Can this be true?" Lillian almost gasped; "when they have told me all these years that the marriage was a farce, and I was a disgraced woman! Just Heaven forgive you, Charles Leland, for the misery you have caused!"

"Then—then," faltered Francis, overwhelmed by this sudden tide of good fortune, "Lillian—my own Lillian, has never been anything but an honorable woman before the law?"

"Never, before the law of God or man!" exclaimed Sanford, stepping to the front, "and if I hadn't been the biggest ass in New York, I'd have discovered it long before this. As it is, we have to thank our good friend Smith here for making us all happy."

"Burr, Mr. Sanford," said Thad, correcting him.

"Smith," insisted Sanford.

"Burr, if you please, Mr. Sanford."

"All right, you may be Burr to the rest of the world, but to me you are, and always will be, Smith."

"Mr. Burr," said Francis, putting his arm about Lillian and bringing her up in front of the detective, "allow me to thank you from our hearts for doing what no other man could have done, removing the vile taint of calumny from a pure woman, and making three lives happy. Name your own reward, sir."

"I have it already," replied Thad. "The only true happiness in this world comes from making others happy, my friends, and my cup is full to overflowing to-night."

"Very well, then; we will talk of this another time," said Francis. "Just now I have a request to make of you. Lillian and I have prepared a little banquet—our wedding supper, as it were, and we desire that you remain and partake of it. We intended sending for you; but as you are here, all the better. Come."

The five friends (including little Lily) repaired to the dining-room, where a splendid repast was spread, and proceeded to enjoy themselves.

The banquet had gone on for some time and the friends were very merry. Toasts were drunk and eternal friendships pledged, and universal joy prevailed.

All of a sudden the sound of a disturbance was heard at the hall door. Loud talking and wrangling broke upon the quiet of that peaceful house. The banqueters paused to listen. What could it mean? Every eye sought some other eye for an explanation, and was answered by a question in return.

The next instant the explanation came.

A wild, haggard disheveled man, hatless and coatless, his clothes torn in shreds and his face covered with blood, rushed panting into the room, in spite of the half-dozen servants who clung to him.

Fighting off his detainers, and hurling them aside with a strength born of desperation, the man staggered to where Lillian sat and sunk upon his knees.

All rose to look at the strange spectacle, but the next instant the man sunk to the floor, gasped the one word, "Forgive!" and expired.

The detective turned him over so that the light fell upon his features, and instantly one name issued from every lip:

"Charles Leland!"

"Dead!" said the detective, putting his hand upon the man's heart. "He has evidently received his death-wound in making his escape from the guards."

THE END.

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